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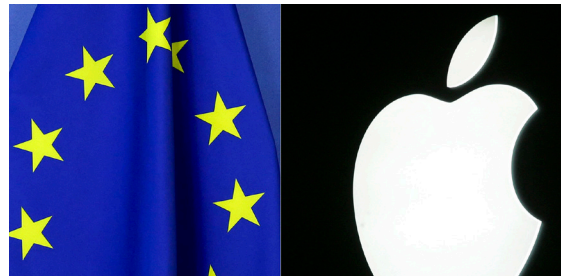
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## Amir hails 'Story of a Homeland'

Sheikh Mishal attends national operetta • Amir heads to UAE on state visit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the national operetta (Story of a Homeland) at Bayan Palace's theater on March 4, 2024. — KUNA photos

### Amir meets UN Deputy SecGen



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives at Bayan Palace on Monday Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina J Mohammed and her delegation. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the national operetta (Story of a Homeland) at Bayan Palace's theater on Monday. The operetta was attended by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, President of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Head of the Court of Cassation Judge Dr Adel Majed Bouresli and senior state officials.

The event started with the national anthem echoing across the hall. Students then presented diverse artistic shows depicting Kuwait's history, its birth, the solidarity of the Kuwaiti people and performances about HH the Amir's speech that sets guidelines for loving the dear homeland. HH the Amir was awarded a memento before he departed the venue amid much applause by the attendees.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal later sent cables of appreciation to Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani and Chairperson of Kuwaiti Voluntary Work Center Sheikhha Amthah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In the cables, HH the Amir expressed his sincere gratitude and appreciation for their efforts in preparing and organizing the national operetta (Story of a Homeland), conducted by the ministry of education under HH the Amir's patronage for the national holidays' celebrations of 2024.

HH the Amir praised the high artistic level of the operetta and its embodiment of love, loyalty and devotion for the homeland, and the distinguished performance of the students, which contributed to its success and beautiful production. HH the Amir

Sheikh Mishal and an accompanying delegation will head to the UAE on Tuesday, March 5, on a state visit.

Mutairi, chairperson of the permanent committee for celebrating national days, expressed deep satisfaction at the honored attendance of HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal of the operetta. Attendance of this national activity by HH the Amir, HH the Prime Minister, senior sheikhs and state officials mirrors the operetta's messages of amity and national values, he said in a statement to KUNA.

The operetta embodied national values, national unity and solidarity and the amicable relationship between the leadership and the people of Kuwait, the minister said, thanking all authorities that participated in organizing the event, namely the ministry of education. — KUNA (See Page 3)

### New Army Chief of Staff, Undersecretary of MoI appointed



KUWAIT: A decree was issued on Monday promoting Major General Pilot Bandar Salem Abdullah Al-Muzain (left) to Lieutenant General and appointing him as Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army. Another decree was issued appointing Sheikh Lieutenant General Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (right) as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior. — KUNA



Gulf Bank Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

### Bader Al-Kharafi appointed as new Gulf Bank Chairman

KUWAIT: The Board of Directors of Gulf Bank gathered on Monday, March 4, 2024, and unanimously elected Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as the new Chairman. Abdullateef Abdulaziz Al-Sharikh, a reserve member, was called upon to join the board, with Ali Morad Bebehani appointed as the Vice Chairman. Other members of the board include Ahmed Mohamed Al-Bahar, Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Tawil, Omar Hamad Al-Qenaici, Barak Abdulmohsen Al-Asfour, Fawaz Mohamed Al-Awadi, Abdullah Sayyar Al-Sayyar, Talal Ali Al-Sayegh, and Reem Abdullah Al-Saleh.

The Board of Directors conveyed their appreciation to Jassim Mustafa Boodai, the former Chairman,

for his dedicated service, reaffirming their commitment to Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, aimed at enhancing financial and operational performance, and delivering exceptional products and services to customers.

Bringing over two decades of experience in the financial and industrial sectors, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi possesses vast expertise – having assumed leadership positions in numerous local and international companies. He became a member of Gulf Bank's Board in March 2012.

Presently, Al-Kharafi serves as the Vice Chairman and Group CEO of Zain Group in Kuwait, Vice Chairman of Zain Saudi Arabia and Vice Chairman of Gulf Cables & Electrical Industries Group Co. He also holds positions as a Board Member and Chairman of the Executive Committee at Boursa Kuwait, Vice Chairman of Heavy Engineering Industries & Shipbuilding Co and Vice Chairman of National Investments Company. Furthermore, he serves as a Board Member on the Middle East Advisory Board at Coutts & Co in the United Kingdom. (See Page 9)

### 42 candidates file to contest polls as registration opens

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Forty-two candidates filed nomination papers on the first day of registration on Monday to run in the April 4 snap parliamentary elections that were called after the previous National Assembly was dissolved in

February. The interior ministry opened registration of candidates after an Amiri decree was issued setting the election date on April 4, during the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Registration of candidates ends on March 13, while withdrawals continue until March 28.

Fifteen members of the dissolved house and five former MPs from previous assemblies registered on the first day. The number of candidates on the first day was higher than the previous elections held in June last year, when only 30 candidates filed nomination papers on the first day. As many as 49 members of the 50 members of the dissolved house have already said they will contest for a seat in the assembly. Only Osama Al-Shaheen has dropped out of the race. The Assembly has been dis-

solved on three occasions since Aug 2020 and it has been dissolved nine times since 2006 due to continued political instability caused by disputes between the government and MPs.

The media center designated for the National Assembly 2024 elections' candidacy registration is prepped and ready for the use of media outlets, an information ministry official earlier said. Assistant Undersecretary Lafi Al-Subaei said the center is equipped with the necessary tech and equipment, aiming to facilitate the work of media personnel in cooperation with the interior ministry. The information ministry has announced that media outlets wishing to cover elections can register via a QR code. The ministry has thus far received more than 380 requests.





# Kuwaiti-Emirati relations: Decades of pivotal points, broadened horizons

Kuwait is one of the first countries to recognize Emirati Federation



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. — KUNA photos



Late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and late President of the UAE Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan.



Late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and late President of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.



Late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

**KUWAIT:** The bonds of shared history, language, and religion between the nations of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates created decades of pivotal points, reinforced relations, and broadened horizons. The astute leadership of both nations aspires towards expanded integration and accelerated sustainable development plans through exchanged visits, continuous collaboration across various fields, and coordinated efforts on re-

gional and international fronts.

The fraternal relations between the two extended for many years, as the year 1952 saw a visit by the late Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to the Emirate of Sharjah, as he also instructed that a Kuwaiti educational mission be sent to the UAE. A medical mission was sent in 1962, and a TV transmission station by the name of Kuwait TV from Dubai was established in 1969.

Kuwait is one of the first countries to recognize the Emirati Federation, established on December 2, 1971. The year 1973 was marked by a meeting between the late Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and UAE President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. The United Arab Emirates played a significant role in 1990 during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait as they took in Kuwaiti families and sent out troops for the liberation war.

Moreover, the two countries are joint on a variety of projects, including joint committees, agreements, MoUs, and investments. The UAE is considered the largest Arab exporter to Kuwait and the second largest worldwide, with \$3.44 billion in 2021 and imports valued at \$1.32 billion. The two seek augmented collaboration on already existing bilateral relations in security, military, cultural activities, sporting events, and educational programs. — KUNA

## Amir's UAE visit an important milestone

**ABU DHABI:** Kuwaiti diplomats in the United Arab Emirates said that the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the UAE represented an important milestone in Kuwaiti-Emirati ties and in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Speaking to KUNA, Kuwait's Ambassador to the UAE, Jamal Al-Ghunaim, said that the visit reflected the depth of Kuwaiti-Emirati common heritage, history, and interest in strengthening and unifying the Gulf countries.

The ambassador pointed out that the leaderships of the two brotherly countries realize the importance of preserving this heritage, preserving its authenticity, and moving forward with their aspirations while at the same time cooperating for more economic and investment development. He added that the state visit witnessed a remarkable

welcome by the people of the UAE, which reflected the value of Kuwaiti leadership and people in the hearts of Emirati people.

Ambassador Al-Ghunaim recalled the historical role of Kuwait and the UAE, as the idea of establishing the GCC was suggested by Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and welcomed by the UAE's first president, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, resulting in the establishment of the council in Abu Dhabi on May 25, 1981. He said that the Kuwaiti-Emirati ties date back to before the establishment of the UAE, praising Kuwait's role in sending an educational mission to the UAE, a medical mission in 1962, and establishing a TV transmission station in the UAE by the name of Kuwait TV in 1969.

He also recalled the role of the United Arab Emirates represented by the UAE's late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan in 1990 during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, followed by the visit of the UAE's late president to Kuwait for further cooperation. Kuwait's Consul General to Dubai and Northern UAE, Ali Al-Thaydi, said to KUNA that His Highness the Amir would be a dear guest to the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan,

and to the people of the UAE.

He emphasized that this visit would strengthen the fraternal relations between the two countries, opening the door for further cooperation in all sectors. Al-Thaydi said that the relations between the two brotherly countries have witnessed significant progress, whether at the bilateral level or through the GCC, pointing out that the great support in times of hardship and prosperity has proven the depth and solidity of these ties.

### Amir's visit is 'important'

His Highness the Amir's visit to the UAE is another important milestone in the history of bilateral ties, said an Emirati diplomat on Monday. Speaking to KUNA, UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi affirmed that the visit by His Highness Sheikh Mishal — the first as the Amir of Kuwait — would help bolster ties on all different levels. He revealed that Kuwait was an important partner of the UAE, revealing that the volume of commercial exchange reached around KD 3.733 billion (\$12.13 billion) in 2023.

The Ambassador said that the signing of the agreement to avoid double taxation and financial evasion at the beginning of this year was a step that would encourage mutual investments and help boost private ventures.



UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi



Kuwait's Ambassador to the UAE Jamal Al-Ghunaim

There are many venues to expand relations commercially, he indicated, alluding to Abu Dhabi Ports Group and Kuwait's efforts to open a cargo maritime route that would facilitate travelers and goods transport. On tourism, Ambassador Al-Neyadi indicated that there were 382,000 visitors from Kuwait to the UAE in 2023, noting that the number of tourists from the UAE to Kuwait had increased by over 50,000 last year. — KUNA

## Al-Durra oilfield 'located in Kuwait territorial waters'

**RIYADH:** The foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states reaffirmed Sunday that the Al-Durra oilfield is entirely located in Kuwait's territorial waters and that the natural wealth in the adjacent submerged, divided area between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia belongs solely to both countries. Wrapping up their 159th regular meeting in Riyadh, the ministers stressed that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have full rights to manipulate the natural resources of the divided zone pursuant to the rules of international law and the existing bilateral agreements.

No third party has any right to an adjacent submerged, divided zone clearly delineated between the Kingdom and Kuwait, according to the final communiqué of the ministerial meeting. The GCC foreign ministers renewed their congratulations to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on his inauguration, expressing confidence that he, thanks to his wise leadership, would enhance Kuwait's effective role in promoting the GCC march towards realization of the noble objectives.

The visits paid by His Highness the Amir to the sisterly GCC member states following his coronation reflected the strength of the deep-rooted relations among the leaders and peoples of the GCC states, the communiqué noted. Hailing the outcomes of the visits by His Highness the Amir to Saudi Arabia on January 30, Oman on February 6, Bahrain on February 13, and Qatar on February 20, the ministers said the visits signaled a shared commitment by the GCC leaders to work for protecting the security and ensuring the stability and prosperity of the GCC states.

The ministers paid tribute to Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, recalling his contributions to the prosperity and welfare of the Kuwaiti people and his role in promoting cooperation among the GCC states and serving the fair causes of the Arab and Muslim nations.



RIYADH: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya joined his Gulf Arab counterparts for talks in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh on Sunday, aiming to further strengthen ties within the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). On the sidelines of the talks, the GCC foreign ministers met with their counterparts from Jordan, Egypt and Morocco, all of which centered on efforts to improve relations, the Riyadh-based bloc said in a statement. — KUNA



The 159th ministerial meeting of GCC foreign ministers. — KUNA photos

### Jordan's security and stability

The chief of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) underlined the bloc's support for any measure aiming to bring security and stability to Jordan amid a spate of "terrorist" attacks along the Hashemite kingdom's border with Syria. Condemning these attacks, Jaseem Al-Budaiwi said that "strategic dialogue" with Amman was necessary to propel Gulf Arab ties with Jordan to greater levels, citing their "intertwined fates and common interests."

Addressing joint ministerial-level talks in

the Saudi capital, he lamented the "catastrophic scenes" in the Gaza Strip, deploring the ongoing violence committed by Zionist forces against the Palestinian people, saying such moves are tantamount to "ethnic cleansing" and forced displacement. The six-member bloc is "unwavering" in its support for the Palestinians, the GCC chief emphasized, vowing to ramp up diplomacy in efforts to halt the violence and protect the Palestinians, subsequently allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave. — KUNA



## Kuwait PM receives UN Deputy Sec-Gen

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, with the attendance of Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, received at Bayan Palace on Monday Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and her delegation. The

meeting was attended by the head of the Prime Minister's Diwan, Abdulaziz Al-Dekheel, the UN Secretary General's Representative and the Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, Ghada Al-Taher, and the assistant foreign minister for international organizations, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Jarallah. — KUNA



# Amir patronizes national operetta

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the national operetta (Story of a Homeland) at the Bayan Palace stage on Monday. The operetta was attended by His

Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Head of the Court of Cassation, Judge Dr Adel Majed Bouresli, and senior State officials. The

event started with tunes of the National Anthem echoing across the hall. Students presented diverse artistic shows depicting Kuwait's history, its birth and the solidarity of the Kuwaiti people. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is awarded amid much applause by the attendees. — KUNA photos



Mesmerizing scenes from the national operetta.





In my view

Communication  
is the right way

Dr. Khalid A Al-Saleh

Local@kuwaittimes.com

During his 1946 visit to the United States, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill lost a significant amount of money playing poker with US President Harry Truman and his advisors. Churchill later humorously remarked that this loss was the best investment of his life. The underlying meaning of this statement was clear – he willingly lost the poker game to appease the American president and his advisors, preserving the crucial support and strong relationship that Britain received from the United States during World War II.

In politics, it is essential to satisfy leaders of superpowers to maintain favorable relations, as the ideals of justice and democracy promoted by the West often hinge on leaders' whims and fancies. Churchill's sarcastic comment highlights the reality of world politics. The United States, as a global power with the largest military and a robust economy, influences the world order. For weaker and even stronger nations, the key lies in establishing close ties with the US, working on communication and improving relations. This is the essence of realpolitik today.

To achieve gains for their countries and people, leaders should adopt Churchill's approach, prioritizing investments over empty slogans. Bragging and slogans, at the expense of capabilities and reality, only jeopardize the nation and its people's hopes. Superpowers do not demand the sale of one's country or hinder its development. Even if a request is refused, they won't become enemies. What leaders need to learn is from those who gained respect and security for their countries by engaging in fruitful investments.

Today, our nation stands at a crossroads. Some advocate for hollow slogans, urging leaders to fight against America for the sake of national dignity, while the people's dignity suffers daily. Others encourage leaders to engage in politics and civilized communication with global leaders to advance the interests of their countries and people. Maintaining dignity is not compromised by communication; ignorance and trading in slogans, however, can result in significant losses. Leaders should focus on informed diplomacy and cooperation rather than falling prey to empty rhetoric.



By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** On the occasion of International Francophonie Day, embassies of member states of the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF) represented in Kuwait announced on Sunday the launch of the Francophonie Month. Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher unveiled the inauguration of Francophonie Month 2024 in Kuwait, scheduled to take place from March 3 to 20, 2024.

Le Flecher revealed plans for an extensive array of events aimed at celebrating the French language and fostering intercultural dialogue within the Kuwaiti community. Among the diverse lineup of activities slated for the monthlong celebration are conferences, film screenings, Girgian and the commemoration of an Olympic Day, promising a rich tapestry of cultural exchange.

The launch of Francophonie Month 2024 serves as a poignant moment to reflect on the significance of Francophonie in Kuwait. The French language holds a prominent position within the country, with its inclusion in public secondary school curricula dating back to the 1960s. Kuwait expressed interest in joining the International Organization of Francophonie, following the Francophonie summit, underscoring its commitment to embrace Francophone culture on a global scale, with official membership anticipated in the near future.

KU, KFAS hold first  
Linguistics Studies  
biennial conference

**KUWAIT:** The first Linguistics Studies Biennial Conference (LSBC), co-organized by Kuwait University and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), kicked off on Monday, focusing on current trends in applied education and corpus perspectives. In an opening speech, Dr. Mohammad Al-Enezi, LSBC co-chair, recognized the distinguished participant speakers and attendees, saying this conference is the first of its kind in Kuwait that would hopefully invigorate local researchers and students in their studies.

In a statement to KUNA, Dr. Al-Enezi said the

conference included workshops in relation to artificial intelligence and linguistics. He also provided the definition of corpus linguistics, which is the study of a collection of texts that pattern and study language through computerized data. In his keynote speech, Dr. Laurence Anthony (Waseda University, Japan) gave a detailed presentation on the use of AI in corpus linguistics.

"Generative AI platforms, such as ChatGPT, can deliver original answers utilizing corpus linguistics, including syntax and semantics, to provide cohesive sentences in English," added Dr. Anthony. Meanwhile, guest speaker Dr. Sandrine Peraldi (University College Dublin, Ireland) presented "Let's wrap this up, shall we? Designing and examining a multimodal corpus of professional online meetings." She detailed the importance of virtual communication through platforms like Zoom and Teams, underscoring the challenges between face-to-face communication and online meetings.

While, the organizing committee extended heartfelt gratitude to all supporters of Francophonie in Kuwait, with special recognition bestowed upon HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Honorary Chairman of the Council for the Promotion of Francophonie in Kuwait (CPFK). His unwavering dedication and support have been instrumental in advancing the cause of Francophonie within Kuwait, fostering cultural exchange and understanding.

At the heart of the International Organization of Francophonie lies a steadfast commitment to advancing the French language alongside a shared set of values that encompass democracy, peace, women's and children's rights, education and the free flow of knowledge.

As anticipation mounts for the year ahead, 2024 emerges as a momentous period for the French-speaking world, marked by the forthcoming Summit of Francophonie, slated to commence on Oct 4. Set against the backdrop of the newly established International City of the French Language in Villers-Cotteret, France, this summit promises to galvanize dialogue and cooperation among Francophone nations, underscoring the enduring significance of linguistic and cultural ties within the global community.

The inauguration of the International City of the French Language on Oct 30, presided over by President Emmanuel Macron, stands as a pivotal moment



Ambassadors of member states of the International Organization of Francophonie pose for a group photo.



Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher speaks at the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

in the history of Francophonie, symbolizing a dedicated space for the celebration and preservation of the French language and culture. This innovative hub serves as a testament to the enduring vitality and relevance of the French language, offering a platform for fostering mutual understanding and collaboration among Francophone countries. With its inauguration, the International City of the French Language emerges as a beacon of linguistic heritage and cultural exchange, poised to catalyze engagement and innovation within the Francophone community for generations to come.

Dr. Peraldi's research highlighted the increased successful utilization of non-verbal gestures as a new form of corpus linguistics in virtual meetings and communication. Additionally, Kuwaiti speakers Dr. Yousef Al-Bader, Dr. Eiman Al-Sharhan and Dr. Bashayer Al-Otaibi presented "Numerical hyperbole in Kuwaiti Arabic: a corpus-based study of exaggeration."

Kuwaiti speakers "invent their own terms for large, indefinite numbers, akin to English's 'zillion' or 'gazillion,'" with "dabalat" (doubles) and "ahlen" (two hellos), indicating the numerous potential inventiveness of the speakers, added Dr. Al-Bader and Dr. Al-Sharhan. Researchers from the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), visiting professors outside Kuwait, members of the academic staff, and students participated and attended the two-day conference. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Jordanian community in Kuwait organized a blood donation campaign under the theme 'Kuwait in my Blood'. The event was held under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi.

Cutting emissions  
and safety among  
priorities: PIC

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) places issues such as safety and health among its priorities in its quest to limit emissions and attain sustainability, said Chief Executive Officer Nadia Al-Hajji. Al-Hajji, in a statement released on Monday marking the second safety week themed "together toward carbon neutrality," said the company had succeeded in executing a lot of ventures aimed at overhauling the operations and cutting emissions.

The company is keen on protecting the envi-

ronment and safety of the workers, Al-Hajji said, indicating that light would be shed on these efforts during the week-long activity. Meanwhile, Hamad Al-Subaiee, the Deputy CEO, affirmed the significance of "safety week" because it is linked to a crucial issue of increasing global interest amid intensified efforts to fight "greenhouse" emissions and stop the damage inflicted on the environment by various human activities.

He added that the company has organized the activity in line with its commitment to His Highness the Amir's directions that the State of Kuwait should partake in the international community's efforts to limit the phenomenal climatic change. PIC is a subsidiary of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and is a petrochemical industry leader in Kuwait and throughout the Middle East and a growing leader worldwide. It boasts 58 years of experience in the chemical industry. — KUNA

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Mass prison break forces Haiti into state of emergency

## Trump puts Biden in crosshairs as 'Super Tuesday' looms

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BEIJING: (Left) The People's Liberation Army (PLA) band performs ahead of the opening ceremony of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on March 4, 2024. (Right) Delegates arrive and take their seats at the conference. — AFP photos

# Pomp, paranoia in Beijing as key political gatherings begin

## Censorship, security checks rampant during conference meant to 'express the voice of the people'

BEIJING: China kicked off its largest political event of the year on Monday with large floral displays, sniffer dogs and red flags aplenty as Beijing put on a carefully choreographed display of national unity.

The country's "Two Sessions" — parallel conclaves of its rubber-stamp parliament and a separate political advisory body — are an annual spectacle that draws thousands of delegates from across China to the capital.

The atmosphere in Beijing on Monday, the opening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), was a mix of pomp and paranoia. Large swathes of the city center were closed off and traffic slowed to a crawl, with police standing guard at checkpoints along Chang'an Avenue, which runs past Tiananmen Square.

Security officers patrolled major streets with sniffer dogs, while elderly volunteers in red armbands monitored pedestrians for suspicious behavior. Train passengers travelling to the capital were subjected to additional security checks, with disembarking crowds squeezing through a metal detector and scrambling to shove suitcases onto an X-ray belt at Beijing South station on Sunday night. But inside the palatial Great Hall of the People on Monday, the country's political elite were welcomed with red carpet and lush flower arrangements. Immaculately coiffed attendants guarded rows of large baby-blue thermoses, waiting to serve the hot water that is a prerequisite at Chinese meetings. Smiling attendees clapped in time to a festive march



China's President Xi Jinping (left) is applauded during the opening ceremony of the CPPCC.

as President Xi Jinping entered the main conference hall for the CPPCC's opening ceremony. "I've been really looking forward to this," said Yang Yuni, a delegate from southwestern Yunnan province, dressed in the elaborately embroidered traditional garb of the Hani ethnic minority. The two-time delegate told AFP she

had been "extremely nervous" as a rookie last year, but was glad to see "familiar faces all around this year".

### Cheerful censorship

Yang arrived in Beijing hoping to raise interest in the traditional agricultural customs of the Hani

people, and promote online sales of local products from her home region. Unlike the National People's Congress, which begins its meeting on Tuesday, the CPPCC has no direct role in government policy but is often a stage for representatives to highlight local concerns and niche interests.

The conference "can reflect the wishes of the masses to the central (government), and better express the voice of the people," Su Haizhen, a delegate from southern Guangxi province, told AFP.

However, only voices that don't stray from Beijing's official narratives are welcome. The Two Sessions usually coincide with a period of heightened censorship and political repression. Administrators of Weibo, one of the country's most popular social media platforms, urged users on Monday to "create a good discourse atmosphere together".

"Let's use our wisdom and passion to contribute wisdom and strength to the glory and development of our country," the administrators exhorted cheerfully, in a statement that also described the deletion of user accounts that had "hyped up societal negativity".

Gao Yu, a Beijing-based independent journalist previously imprisoned for critical reporting about the ruling Communist Party, said on her X account last week that national security officers had been calling "sensitive individuals" in the city ahead of the meetings. "Going into the Two Sessions period, life in Beijing gets really unbearable," she wrote. — AFP

## Zionist entity blows up home of slain Palestinian man

NABLUS: Zionist troops on Monday blew up the home of a Palestinian accused of killing a British-Zionist woman and her two daughters in the occupied West Bank last year. The apartment of Moaz Al-Masry, who was killed by Zionist forces following the attack in April last year, was demolished in the early hours, Palestinian witnesses and the Zionist military told AFP.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said their medics treated about 15 people after Zionist forces fired tear gas during the raid on the West Bank city of Nablus. Masry, along with two other attackers, was accused of shooting dead the Zionist settler and her daughters as they were driving near Hamra in the Jordan Valley. Following a manhunt, the assailants were killed in a military raid on Nablus in May.

Troops overnight on Monday stormed the Al-Makhfiya neighborhood in Nablus and surrounded Masry's house, a witness told AFP. The entity routinely demolishes the homes of Palestinians accused of carrying out attacks, arguing that such measures act as a deterrent, while critics say it amounts to collective punishment. The Red Crescent told AFP they had evacuated multiple residents, including children, from the building housing Masry's apartment.

**Ramallah raid**  
Zionist forces also raided the Palestinian administrative capital of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank overnight, killing a 16-year-old in a refugee camp during their biggest such operation into the city in years, Palestinian sources told Reuters on Monday.

The Zionist military said that during the action, a riot broke out between Palestinians throwing rocks and petrol bombs and the soldiers, who responded with live fire. Witnesses in Ramallah said the Zionist forces had driven dozens of military vehicles into the city, the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority (PA) led by President Mahmoud Abbas which exercises limited self-rule over parts of the West Bank.

The Palestinian health ministry said Zionist forces shot and killed 16-year-old Mustafa Abu Shalbak while raiding Am'ari refugee camp. The Palestinian news agency Wafa said confrontations broke out as Zionist forces stormed the camp, "during which live bullets were fired at Palestinian youths", wounding Abu Shalbak in the neck and chest.

An AFP photographer saw troops marching two blindfolded Palestinians through a street, while multiple soldiers pointed their weapons at surrounding buildings. The military said it carried out a "counter-terrorism operation" at the camp and apprehended two wanted suspects. "During the operation, a violent riot developed, in which suspects hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails at Zionist security forces, who responded with live fire. A hit was identified," the military said in a statement. — AFP

## Civilian deaths in Gaza test Zionist AI precision claims

PARIS: The Zionist military has said AI helps it more accurately target militants in its five-month war against Hamas, but as Gaza deaths rise, experts are questioning how effective algorithms can really be. The health ministry in the Gaza Strip says the war has killed upwards of 30,000 people, the majority of them civilians.

"Either the AI is as good as claimed and the IDF (Zionist military) doesn't care about collateral damage, or the AI is not as good as claimed," Toby Walsh, chief scientist at the University of New South Wales AI Institute in Australia, told AFP.

The health ministry does not specify how many militants are included in the Gaza toll. The Zionist entity has said its forces "eliminated 10,000 terrorists" since the war began in early October, following a deadly attack by Hamas on the Zionist entity's southern communities and military bases, which killed 1,160 people.

The entity's claimed use of algorithms adds another layer of concern for activists already alarmed by artificial intelligence-powered hardware like drones and gunsights that are being deployed in Gaza. The Zionist military told AFP it had no comment on its AI targeting systems. But the army has repeatedly claimed its forces target only militants and take measures to avoid harm to civilians.

### 'Precise attacks'

The Zionist entity began hyping AI-powered targeting after an 11-day conflict in Gaza during May 2021, which commanders branded the world's "first AI war". The military chief during the 2021 war, Aviv Kochavi, told Zionist news website Ynet last year that the force had used AI systems to identify "100 new targets every day". "In the past, we would produce 50 targets in Gaza in a year," he said.

A blog entry on the Zionist military's website posted after it launched its recent attack on Gaza said its AI-enhanced "targeting directorate" had identified more than 12,000 targets in just 27 days. An unnamed Zionist official was quoted as saying the AI system, called Gospel, produced targets "for precise attacks called infrastructure associated with Hamas, inflicting

great damage on the enemy and minimal harm to those not involved". But an anonymous former Zionist intelligence officer, quoted in November by independent publication +972 Magazine, described Gospel's work as creating a "mass assassination factory". Citing an intelligence source, the report said Gospel crunches vast amounts of data faster than "tens of thousands of intelligence officers" and identifies, in real time, locations likely to be used by suspected militants. However, the sources gave no detail of the data put into the system or the criteria used to determine the targets.

### 'Dubious data'

Several experts told AFP the military was likely to be feeding the system with drone footage, social media posts, information from agents on the ground, mobile phone locations and other surveillance data. Once the system identifies a target, it could use population data from official sources to estimate the likelihood of civilian harm. But Lucy Suchman, professor of anthropology of science and technology at Britain's Lancaster University, said the idea that more data would produce better targets was untrue. Algorithms are trained to find patterns in data that match a certain designation — in the Gaza conflict, possibly "Hamas affiliate", she said. Any pattern in the data matching a previously identified affiliate would generate a new target, but any "questionable assumptions" would be amplified, Suchman explained. "In other words, more dubious data equals worse systems."

### Humans in control

The Zionist entity are not the first fighting force to deploy automated targeting on the battlefield. As far back as the 1990-91 Gulf War, the US military worked on algorithms to improve targeting. For the 1999 Kosovo bombing campaign, NATO began using algorithms to calculate potential civilian casualties.

And the US military had hired secretive data firm Palantir to provide battlefield analytics in Afghanistan. Backers of the technology have repeatedly insisted it will reduce civilian deaths. But some military analysts are skeptical that the technology is advanced enough to be trusted. In a blog post for the British Royal United Services Institute defense think-tank, analyst Noah Sylvia said last month that humans would still need to cross-check every output. The Zionist military is "one of the most technologically advanced and integrated militaries in the world", he said. But "the odds of even the IDF using an AI with such a degree of sophistication and autonomy are low". — AFP



NABLUS: Palestinians inspect the debris of the house of Moaz Al-Masry, a Palestinian who was killed by Zionist forces after being accused of killing a British-Zionist settler and her two daughters last year. — AFP



## International

# Trump puts Biden in crosshairs as 'Super Tuesday' looms

48% of registered voters would pick Trump if election was held today: New York Times poll



WASHINGTON/GREENSBORO: (Left) US President Joe Biden speaks to the press before he departs the White House on March 1, 2024. (Right) Former US President and 2024 presidential hopeful Donald Trump arrives to speak during a "Get Out the Vote" rally on March 2, 2024. — AFP photos

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump will march to the threshold of a third Republican presidential nomination this week as millions of Americans vote in "Super Tuesday" — a critical milestone in the giant lopsided 2024 race for the White House.

Normally the most consequential part of the campaign before the election itself, Super Tuesday decides Republican and Democratic primaries in the giant states of California and Texas, as well as more than a dozen other battlegrounds.

But the usual drama will largely be absent this year, with the door expected to swing firmly shut on Trump's only remaining challenger, Nikki Haley, and clear the way for a repeat of his 2020 match-up with Joe Biden.

The president is virtually unopposed in the Democratic contest and will look to keep an insurmountable lead against

two single-digit challengers. Haley lost the early nominating states by wide margins, and pundits give her little chance of catching up to Trump, who claims his opponent has "no traction" and will lose every Super Tuesday state.

"If every single conservative, Republican and Trump supporter in these states shows up on Super Tuesday, we will be very close to finished with this primary contest," Trump said in a campaign message ahead of the big vote. "Republicans will then be able to focus all of our energy, time and resources on defeating crooked Joe Biden, the worst president in the history of our country."

Fifteen states and one territory — American Samoa — make up Tuesday's map, and hopefuls can bag 70 percent of the delegates they need to be named the presumptive nominee. Trump cannot close

out the contest on that night but expects to be anointed by March 19 at the latest.

## Post-Trump Republicans

Haley, who warns voters that nominating Trump spells general election defeat for Republicans, has plenty of cash on hand but says she has not decided if she will continue beyond Tuesday. Her goal is to make America a better country, she says, although many analysts suspect she is building for a more realistic run in the post-Trump party of 2028.

Others have speculated that she is hanging on until the Republican National Convention in July in case delegates have second thoughts about formally nominating Trump as his criminal cases close in.

The tycoon has spent nine days in court this year, complaining that his

prosecutions — mostly involving allegations of cheating in elections — are keeping him from the campaign trail. As he makes his case for reelection in a televised address Tuesday at his south Florida beach club, his lawyers will be preparing their own arguments for the start of his New York trial for 2016 campaign finance violations.

The whiff of scandal that follows Trump is seen as a turn-off for middle-of-the-road Americans, and a chunk of moderate Republicans have repudiated him in each primary contest. Analysts have questioned whether he has the ability or will to broaden his appeal beyond his loyal base and parlay his popularity in the primaries into a second term in office.

"Crucial battleground states either have a fairly equal proportion of voters

registered as Democrats and Republicans, or lean Democratic," said political analyst Gerard Filitti, senior counsel at Jewish-focused legal think tank The Lawfare Project.

"If only 60 percent of Republicans vote for Trump and he fails to attract the majority of independents — as is suggested by his polling to date — barring an unusually low turnout for Biden, the math is not there for him to win."

But Biden also faces divisions among Democratic supporters, and a New York Times survey published on Saturday flagged waning support among normally reliable constituencies like blue-collar workers and non-white voters. The nationwide poll of registered voters found that if the election were held today, 48 percent would choose Trump with 43 percent for Biden. — AFP

## Delegates, not votes, unlock the gates for White House race

WASHINGTON: When the richest haul in the US presidential primary race arrives on "Super Tuesday," millions of Americans will cast their votes — and many of them will count for nothing. In the primary system it is the number of allocated delegates that matters more than the popular vote count.

The Republican and Democratic nominating con-

tests that play out across the United States every four years serve to elect delegates to the national conventions, where they formally select their party's presidential nominee.

Most of the 15 states holding primaries on "Super Tuesday" award them on a winner-takes-all basis, meaning a strong second place showing can result in zero delegates for that candidate. It's a system that tends to favor front-runners, and for Nikki Haley, the sole remaining challenger to Donald Trump for the Republican nomination, it's one that has dulled her already razor thin chances.

Haley won 40 percent of the vote in her home state of South Carolina, but received only three delegates, while Trump added 47 to his seemingly

unassailable tally. On Sunday night Haley chalked up her first primary win, in Washington, DC, taking 19 delegates.

With 2,429 Republican delegates from across the country, Trump needs at least 1,215 to secure his lock on the nomination. Having won all eight early state and territory contests, he already has more than 247 delegates in his column compared to Haley's 24 going into Super Tuesday, when more than a third of the national Republican total is up for grabs.

Trump's dominance is such that he could cross the magic threshold as early as March 19 — even though the primary calendar stretches into early June. On the Democratic side, incumbent Biden is a virtual lock.

The delegate numbers differ between the par-

ties, but the process is similar. There are currently 3,934 Democratic delegates in play, and Biden's magic number for victory is 1,968. He already has 206 delegates, and could also secure the nomination in March.

That means the re-match between Biden and Trump — who will be the oldest ever pair of nominees — will involve one of the longest presidential campaigns in US history. The Republican National Convention is scheduled for July in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, while Democrats gather for their convention in August in Chicago. The delegates also endorse the party's candidate for vice president, selected by the presidential hopeful and often announced a few days before the convention. — AFP

## US demands 'immediate' Gaza truce

GAZA: Mediators in Cairo persisted Monday with efforts towards a Gaza truce after the Zionist entity's top ally the United States stepped up pressure for a halt in fighting and more aid to enter the besieged Palestinian territory. Bombardments and combat killed 124 more people within 24 hours, said the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. Gaza has been devastated and gripped by dire food shortages in the war.

Qatari and Egyptian mediators were meeting with United States and Hamas envoys — but no Zionist delegates so far — in Cairo for a second day of talks. They are aiming for a halt in fighting before the holy fasting month of Ramadan starts on March 10 or 11. An Egyptian TV channel linked to the intelligence service reported "significant progress" towards a deal without giving further details, while a Hamas official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the talks were continuing.

The plan under discussion is for a six-week truce, the exchange of dozens of remaining captives for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and for more aid to enter Gaza — but sticking points remain. Hamas wants the Zionist entity to withdraw all its forces, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the army will finish its campaign to destroy Hamas, including in Rafah where about 1.5 million Palestinians have tried to find refuge near Egypt's border. The Zionist entity has also demanded a list of all remaining hostages. It has said it believes 130 of the original 250 captives taken by Hamas remain in Gaza, but that 31 have been killed.

United States Vice President Ka-

mala Harris — whose country provides billions of dollars in military aid to the Zionist entity — called on Sunday for the truce deal to be accepted. She criticized the Zionist entity in unusually strong language over insufficient aid deliveries into Gaza. "Given the immense scale of suffering in Gaza, there must be an immediate ceasefire for at least the next six weeks, which is what is currently on the table," she said in a speech in Alabama.

She told Hamas that the group "needs to agree to that deal" while upping the pressure on the Zionist entity by stressing that Gazans were starving in "inhumane" conditions and demanding the Netanyahu government "do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses."

President Joe Biden faces acute pressure in an election year over his steadfast support for the Zionist entity and Gaza's soaring civilian death toll, which the health ministry there put at 30,534, mostly women and children. Harris, as well as Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, were later set to meet the Zionist entity's former military chief Benny Gantz in Washington.

Gantz is a member of Netanyahu's war cabinet — but also a centrist political rival of the rightwing veteran premier, whom he harshly criticized before the war. In a sign of political divisions, David Amsalem, the Zionist entity's minister of regional co-operation, in a post on social media platform X said Gantz's "entry into government was intended to create unity at a time of emergency, not to be a Trojan horse".

While diplomacy takes place the war grinds on. Witnesses reported clashes in Gaza City's Zeitun neighborhood and the main southern city of Khan Yunis. The Hamas government media office said "dozens of air strikes" and "intense artillery shelling" hit across Gaza. Sameh Abdel Hadi, a displaced Gazan, described being trapped under rubble following an air strike on Rafah. "The whole roof came down," he said. "For



GAZA: Wounded Palestinian Nidal Al-Gharib, who lost his wife and daughter, walks past his neighbors' house destroyed by Zionist bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 4, 2024. — AFP

half an hour I couldn't see anything. Later people came and broke in the door to rescue me." Five people were killed and three remained missing, he said, adding that no one in the house was involved with the groups fighting the Zionist entity.

Gaza's hunger crisis came into stark relief last Thursday when more than 100 Palestinians were killed in chaotic scenes around a convoy of aid trucks in Gaza City. Gaza health officials said Zionist forces opened fire into the crowd, while the Zionist entity's army said most victims were trampled to death or hit by trucks in a crush for food. The UN Security Council voiced concern over Gaza's "alarming levels of acute food insecurity" and urged "unhin-

dered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale".

Palestinian families have told AFP of eating ground up animal feed and foraged plants, while the health ministry said at least 16 children have died of malnutrition in Gaza's aid-deprived north. The UN cites "restrictions" as among the factors hindering delivery of food in Gaza, where it is warning of famine. In an interview published on Saturday, France's foreign minister said the Zionist entity is "clearly" responsible for aid blockage. King Abdullah II of Jordan called in a meeting with Arab politicians of the Zionist entity for an "immediate ceasefire", his royal palace said.

The Gaza war has sparked violence

across the region. On Monday, a foreign worker in the Zionist entity was killed and at least seven others wounded in a missile strike near the Lebanese border, the Zionist medics said. Marine security firm Ambrey reported a Liberian-flagged vessel was targeted off Yemen, whose Iran-backed Houthi rebels, saying they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians, have repeatedly fired on ships in the Red Sea area.

United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk warned that the war "has already generated dangerous spillover in neighboring countries, and I am deeply concerned that in this powder keg, any spark could lead to a much broader conflagration". — AFP



## International

# Mass prison break forces Haiti into state of emergency

## Gangs kill about a dozen people in less than 24 hours, say they want prime minister out

**PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti:** Haiti's government declared on Sunday a state of emergency and nighttime curfew in a bid to regain control of the country after a deadly gang assault on the capital's main prison that allowed thousands of inmates to escape. The curfew will be enforced from 6 pm to 5 am in the Ouest region, which includes the capital, through Wednesday, the government said in a statement, adding that both the curfew and the state of emergency can be extended.

About a dozen people died as gang members attacked the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince overnight Saturday into Sunday, an AFP reporter observed. The attack came as part of a new spate of extreme violence in the Haitian capital, where well-armed gangs who control much of the city have wreaked havoc since Thursday.

The gangs say they want to oust Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who has led the crisis-racked Caribbean nation since the assassination of president Jovenel Moïse in 2021. Only around 100 of the National Penitentiary's estimated 3,800 inmates were still inside the facility Sunday after the gang assault, Pierre Esperance of the National Network for Defense of Human Rights said. "We counted many prisoners' bodies," he added.

An AFP reporter who visited the prison on Sunday observed around a dozen bodies outside it and hardly anyone inside. Some bodies had wounds from bullets or other projectiles. In its statement late Sunday, the Haitian government said security forces had "received orders to use all legal means at their disposal to enforce the curfew and detain those who violate it."

It said the objective was to allow the government

to "re-establish order and take the appropriate measures to take back control of the situation." Economy Minister Patrick Michel Boisvert signed the statement as the country's acting prime minister. Prime Minister Henry was in Kenya last week to sign an agreement to deploy police from the East African country to lead a UN-backed law and order mission to the gang-plagued nation.

Haiti's government is notoriously weak — kidnapping and other violent crime is rampant and gangs are described as much better armed than the police themselves. Gang members also attacked a second prison called Croix des Bouquets, police said earlier.

Known gang leaders and people charged in the assassination of Moïse were among those incarcerated in the main prison, located a few hundred meters from the National Palace, the Haitian daily Le Nouvelliste said.

The prison had been "spied on by the assailants since Thursday via drones," before it was attacked early Saturday evening, according to Le Nouvelliste. Esperance said it was not immediately clear how many inmates escaped from the second prison, which he said held 1,450 inmates.

### Kenya-led security mission

Powerful gang leader Jimmy Chérèsier, known by the nickname Barbecue, said in a video posted on social media that armed groups in Haiti were acting in concert "to get Prime Minister Ariel Henry to step down." It was not immediately clear on Sunday if the prime minister had returned to Haiti after his Kenya trip.

The UN Security Council in October approved an



**PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti:** This screen grab shows tires on fire near the main prison of Port-au-Prince on March 3, 2024, after a breakout by several thousand inmates. — AFP

international police support mission to Haiti that Nairobi had agreed to lead, but a Kenyan court ruling has thrown its future into doubt. On Friday, Henry signed an accord in Nairobi with Kenyan President William Ruto on deploying the force.

Ruto said he and Henry had "discussed the next steps to enable the fast-tracking of the deployment," but it was not immediately clear whether the agreement would counter a court ruling in January that

branded the deployment "illegal." Haiti, the Western hemisphere's poorest nation, has been in turmoil for years, and the 2021 presidential assassination plunged the country further into chaos. No elections have taken place since 2016 and the presidency remains vacant. Protesters have demanded Henry's resignation in line with a political deal that required Haiti to hold polls and for him to cede power to newly elected officials by February 7 of this year. — AFP

## US Supreme Court rules Trump can stay on Colorado ballot

**WASHINGTON:** The US Supreme Court on Monday removed a potential hurdle to Donald Trump's bid to recapture the White House, unanimously dismissing a state court ruling that could have barred him from the ballot for engaging in insurrection. The high-stakes ruling in favor of the former president came on the eve of the Super Tuesday primaries that are expected to cement Trump's march toward the Republican nomination to take on President Joe Biden in November.

It was the most consequential election case heard by the court since it halted the Florida vote recount in 2000 with Republican George W Bush narrowly lead-

ing Democrat Al Gore. The question before the nine justices was whether Trump was ineligible to appear on the Republican presidential primary ballot in Colorado because he engaged in an insurrection — the January 6, 2021 assault on the US Capitol by his supporters.

In a 9-0 decision, the conservative-dominated court said "the judgment of the Colorado Supreme Court ... cannot stand," meaning 77-year-old Trump, the Republican White House frontrunner, can appear on the state's primary ballot. "All nine Members of the Court agree with that result," they added.

The case stemmed from a ruling in December by the state Supreme Court in Colorado, one of the 15 states and territories voting on Super Tuesday. The court, citing the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, ruled that Trump should be kicked off the ballot because of his role in the January 6 attack on Congress, when a mob tried to halt certification of Biden's 2020 election victory.

### 'Preserve the freedoms'

The draft law would replace a 2011 decree that saw the creation of over 25,000 organizations after the uprising that ousted dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and set in motion what later came to be known as the Arab Spring. "According to a study we did, by limiting civil society's financial resources, we risk losing around 30,000 direct jobs" and about 100,000 indirect jobs, Trifi said.

Critics worry that this would exacerbate unemployment rates, which already stand at 16 percent overall and 40 percent among the youth. Shanti, an association that employs 22 full-time workers and manages over 100 projects involving crafts, farming and eco-tourism nationwide, may be among those affected. The group receives over 90 percent of its funding from abroad. Their projects like L'Artisanerie, a workshop in Tunis that supports about 60 craftspeople selling items including handmade carpets, pottery and furniture, could also be impacted. "We're on alert about what's going to happen," said Shanti's head Mehdi Baccouche. He said that he is not opposed to new regulation, but that any change should result from "a permanent dialogue" between organizations and authorities. "It's important to preserve the freedoms acquired by associations and to continue to develop access to national and foreign funds," Baccouche said. "The development of the associative sector brings thousands of jobs and, beyond that, thousands of people are directly impacted."

Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association, said the proposed legislation also "gives excessive powers to the authority which can, according to its agenda, refuse an association." "The 2011 decree is an achievement of the revolution that must be preserved," Voule told AFP. The current law allows the creation of an organization simply by notifying the government, without requiring approval. This has allowed for the flourishing of NGOs working on political and social issues, such as women's and LGBTQ rights. — AFP

## Tunisian civil society fears plan to limit foreign funding

**TUNIS:** Tunisian civil society groups fear the government is planning to starve them of foreign funding under the pretext of fighting money laundering and terrorism. President Kais Saïed, who launched a sweeping power grab in 2021 and rules by decree, has accused many non-government organizations of serving "foreign agendas".

Under a draft law he supported, state authorities would have to approve all foreign funding for NGOs that operate in the North African country. Human rights groups worry it is another repressive measure in the country that became known as the birthplace of the Arab Spring protests more than a decade ago.

"The aim of the bill is to restrict civil society — its financing, its activity and to limit its work to certain topics suggested by the political authority," said Bassem Trifi, president of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights. If the draft law is enacted, Trifi warned, "Tunisia will lose its civil society and all the work it has done". Amnesty International warned that the "absolute discretion given to the government to authorize or deny funding requests of civil society groups may constitute a disproportionate restriction of the right to freedom of association".

The Tunisian groups also worry that tens of thousands of jobs will be lost if funding from abroad dries up, given that most organizations receive little to no public money in the recession-hit and highly indebted country. Saïed, elected democratically in October 2019, sacked parliament in July 2021 and assumed most executive powers. A number of Saïed's opponents are behind bars as Tunisia prepares for presidential elections set to take place in October.



**TUNIS:** Trade unionists shout slogans as they take to the streets of Tunis to protest against a proposed legislation that will grant the government sweeping powers over NGOs, on March 2, 2024. — AFP



**SEOUL:** A doctor wearing a mask holds a placard during a rally against the government's plan to raise the annual enrolment quota at medical schools. — AFP

## S Korea to start action against striking doctors

**SEOUL:** South Korea said Monday it will take steps to suspend the licenses of striking trainee doctors who have defied orders to return to work in a standoff over medical training reforms. Around 9,000 junior doctors walked out nearly two weeks ago to protest against an increase in medical school admissions from next year which is meant to help combat shortages and meet the demands of an ageing society. The striking trainees have defied a February 29 government deadline for them to return to work or face legal action, including possible arrest or suspension of their medical licenses. Despite repeated government appeals, the number returning to work "has been minimal", Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told a press conference.

"Starting today the government is enforcing legal measure," he said, noting inspections at hospitals nationwide would be conducted on Monday to find out who had returned or not. If doctors' "absence is confirmed" from the on-site inspections, he said, the government would notify them that procedures to suspend their licenses were underway. "If they violate the government's back to work order, a three-month-suspension is inevitable."

Such a suspension would lead to a delay of at least a year in getting a specialization medical certificate, he warned, and negatively affect career prospects. As of Thursday nearly 9,000 trainee doctors, or 72 percent of the whole junior workforce, were on walkouts, Park said. Only 565 doctors had resumed work by the deadline, according to figures released by the health ministry. The mass work stoppage has taken a toll on hospitals, with crucial treatments and surgeries cancelled, prompting the government to raise its public health alert to the highest level.

Around half of the surgeries scheduled at some major hospitals have been cancelled since last week, according to the health ministry. Under South Korean law, doctors are restricted from striking, and the government has requested police investigate people connected to the stoppage.

The warning Monday followed the government's February 29 deadline for the trainee doctors to return to hospitals while remaining firm on its plan to increase medical school admissions by 65 percent. While the ultimatum fell on Thursday, the government would take into consideration those who had since returned to work, Park said. South Korea's government is pushing to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools annually from next year to address what it calls one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed nations. — AFP



**DHAKA:** This photograph taken on February 29, 2024 shows Bangladeshi Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus during an interview with AFP. — AFP

## Bangladesh Nobel laureate fears for future as woes mount

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus says it is a "million-dollar question" why the prime minister hates him, but says many believe she sees him as a political threat. Yunus, 83, is credited with lifting millions out of poverty with his pioneering microfinance bank but has earned the enmity of long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Last month, several of his firms were "forcefully" taken over, weeks after his conviction in a criminal case his supporters say was politically motivated. "She calls me bloodsucker, calls me all the dirty things she can come up with," he said. "Why (does) she hate me? Some say it's political ... (that) she sees me as a political opponent," he added, carefully avoiding directly accusing Hasina herself.

In January, Yunus and three colleagues from Grameen Telecom, one of the firms he founded, were sentenced to jail for six months after they were found guilty of violating labor laws. All four deny the charges, and have been bailed pending appeal.

### 'One-party state'

Yunus, who is facing more than 100 other charges over labor law violations and alleged graft, said the forcible takeover of his companies was related to a lack of democracy. "Those cases are made on flimsy grounds," he told AFP in an interview in the capital Dhaka last week. "Since I don't see any legal basis for that, probably it is politically motivated."

Around 160 global figures, including former US president Barack Obama and ex-UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, published a joint letter last year denouncing the "continuous judicial harassment" of Yunus. The signatories, including more than 100 of his fellow Nobel laureates, said they feared for "his safety and freedom".

Hasina, 76, won her fourth consecutive general election in January, in a vote without genuine opposition parties, with a widespread boycott and a major crackdown against her political opponents.

Critics accuse Bangladeshi courts of rubber-stamping decisions made by Hasina's government. "It's a one-party state because other parties don't count," he said. "We cannot express our views and go to the polling booth and exercise our voting right". — AFP



# Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2024

## NIC records KD 4.1m net profit in 2023

### Board recommends distribution of a cash dividend of 15 fils per share

**KUWAIT:** The National Investments Company's Board of Directors approved the company's consolidated financial statements for the financial year ending Dec 31, 2023, where its financial and operational performance recorded growth, thanks to its successful strategic vision and diversification aimed at providing sustainable returns and maximizing shareholder value. This contributed to achieving financial profits amounting to KD 4.1 million at 5 fils per share during the financial year ending Dec 31, 2023, despite the challenges and negative performance of the markets and the local and global economy in general during 2023.

#### Solid financial position

NIC Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said that the company maintained its profits during 2023 despite the challenges reflected in the performance of the local, regional, and global capital markets. These challenges and difficulties guided the company's selections for defensive stocks, which helped face the rapid global changes this year.

The National Investments Company maintained its solid financial position and ability to achieve growth rates during 2023. We have started the year with a positive outlook while maintaining operations through implementing a range of mergers and acquisitions, sales and restructuring operations, and various advisory services. Positive results accompanied this despite the adverse capital markets fluctuations, both in Kuwait and the region, thanks to the leading position achieved by NIC being one of the largest investment companies in Kuwait and the area for several decades, which led to notable successes, ability to overcome crises on local, regional, and global levels, and preserve the interests of its clients efficiently and transparently.

Regarding Boursa Kuwait's performance, Al-Kharafi mentioned that it had ended its trading for 2023 with a decline in its indices, as the General Market index declined by 6.5 percent, Premier Market by 7.9 percent, and Main Market by 0.5 percent.

It is worth noting that the October trading coincided with the "Al-Aqsa Flood," which increased the intensity of selling pressures. This was directly reflected in the performance of stocks and indices, as the general market index recorded a decline of 5.2 percent during October, and the first market index for the same period decreased by 5.1 percent, their worst monthly performance since June 2020.

Boursa Kuwait's negative performance during 2023 was driven by a few undesirable data that harmed investors, including the high interest rates, the tight US monetary policy, and some sectors affected by the interest rate hike, such as the real estate, industrial, and financial sectors. Another factor was the growing fear of a recession for the global economy, not to mention the recent regional geopolitical tensions; all these factors have harmed the stock market's performance in general.

As for the November and December trading, they witnessed a noticeable recovery due to the state of relative satisfaction experienced by all financial markets, whether regional or global, after the decision of the US Federal Reserve to fix the interest rate for the third time in a row during its meeting in early November, which created a state of optimism and satisfaction among investors as an indication of the end of the end of the monetary tightening policy pursued by global central banks since early last year. In November, the General Market index rose by 1.9 percent and the Premier Market index by 2.1 percent; this positive state continued in December, supported by the



National Investments Company Chairman  
Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi



NIC Board Member and CEO Fahad  
Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim

continued selective buying and the desire to reconstitute new investment positions towards the end of the year.

#### Performance indicators

Al-Kharafi reviewed NIC's financial indicators during the past year and mentioned that the company's total assets amounted to KD 249.3 million by the end of 2023, and the fiduciary assets under management reached approximately KD 1.05 billion. The total shareholders' equity of the parent company amounted to KD 173.3 million.

Despite the change in interest rates on both regional and global levels, which led to a negative reflection in the performance of the GCC market indices, reaching 6.5 percent in Kuwait, 6.2 percent in Abu Dhabi, and 7.1 percent in Oman, the company maintained a net financial profit, achieving annual profits and significant growth in all fundamental financial indicators. He also highlighted the positive profitability indicators and return on average assets and average shareholders' equity, improving asset quality indicators and maintaining reasonable cost and revenue ratios simultaneously, as the company achieved a KD 4.1 million profits, 5 fils per share, for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2023, comparing to KD 8.7 million and 11 fils per share on Dec 31, 2022.

NIC's Board of Directors agreed on a distribution of cash dividends at the rate of 15 percent of the nominal value per share, ie, 15 fils per share for the fiscal year ending in 2023, which confirms the solidity and strength of NIC's financial position. This recommendation is subject to the approval of the company's general assembly. Al-Kharafi shed light on the prudent strategy followed by NIC in reducing risks, capitalization levels, and strong liquidity and that the company is taking proactive steps in creating new paths to enhance its leading position by making a sustainable impact and expanding the scope of services within the various sectors and markets. To achieve that, NIC maintains an innovative approach and the highest levels of efficiency in dealing with various economic crises and challenges, and therefore, achieves excellence in serving customers and shareholders and attaining lasting positive change for them, appreciating their confidence and continuous support for NIC.

#### A year full of achievements

Testimony on the company's position: In a special awards ceremony in London, Euro-money awarded NIC the Best Wealth Management Company in Kuwait Award for 2023 in the (Best for Ultra) High Net Worth Individuals in Kuwait category. This award is one of the

most critical regional awards in the financial sector, a prestigious and pioneering achievement that enhances the company's position, product quality, and leadership in Kuwait.

To conclude, Al-Kharafi emphasized the strength of the main operational elements that enhance the company's performance and the quality of its work, a solid foundation on which to base growth plans during the current year. He also praised the Board of Directors' support and the executive management's efforts characterized by high professionalism. He also appreciated the sincere efforts of the management and all employees who stand behind every single success achieved.

#### Environmental, Social, and Governance Criteria

Under NIC's prudent strategy and wise vision in highlighting its role in social responsibility to achieve a positive mental image of the company in society by adhering to this role and working to raise awareness of its importance as part of the company's annual program. The company has supported national sustainability because of the local and global interest in 'sustainability' and environmental, social, and governance (ESG). It has become a critical driver for promoting opportunities to establish a sustainable approach by adopting a proactive responsibility in several areas, as the sustainability report will be launched this year.

Highlighting its role in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility, which is translated into supporting many initiatives, programs, and events in collaboration with 'Creative Confidence,' NIC also played the strategic supporter role in the "SHIFT" program, designed specifically for newly graduated Kuwaiti women to enhance their skills and capabilities, and qualify them to enter the investment labor market in the local markets and the region.

In support of sports-related activities, NIC has also offered a platinum sponsorship for the BNK Padel tournament to encourage and develop sports culture within society. Also, during the holy month of Ramadan, the company supported the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank, providing Eid Al-Fitr clothing for needy families.

#### A positive work environment

Through its future vision and strategic plans, NIC has continued to support its human resources as a critical pillar in all its achievements and to provide diverse ideas and outputs based on creativity and innovation, which significantly affect the company's productivity, through training academies and specialized programs that help refine their scientific and

practical skills and increase their expertise for their benefit and create a positive and healthy work environment for employees through social and recreational initiatives and activities.

#### Successful deals and positive results

Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Mukhaizim, Board Member and Chief Executive Officer of The National Investments Company, said that the financial results achieved by the company during the year 2023 confirm its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and operational excellence, which reflect the company's efforts in enhancing the efficiency and maintain the solid position. This reflected positively towards enhancement and maintaining the assets managed by the company by attracting investments in multiple investment portfolios and the company's various investment opportunities with distinctive value and very stimulating figures during the year 2023 through new clients and by attracting a broad segment of investors in multiple portfolios by an additional percentage of more than 22 percent on the number of investment portfolios for new clients from individuals, local companies and foreign investors, which witnessed more demand for investment funds managed by the company, in addition to providing several distinguished services to our clients in different areas of planning to protect global real estate assets.

Al-Mukhaizim also pointed to the successes achieved by NIC, thanks to the company's extensive network and strategic vision in attracting investments and advisory services. The company started the year 2023 with a robust set of investment operations that included mergers, acquisitions, and capital increases and managed to handle many private placements and qualitative consultations on Boursa Kuwait.

The value of the deals until the end of 2023 amounted to approximately \$400 million, which was represented in pioneering deals, including the sale of the largest and most successful deals in the education sector in Kuwait; it represents a milestone and a key milestone for the investment advisory and investment services business market. In addition to the second partial purchase in Kuwait on behalf of Al-Rawasi Kuwait Holding Company in the capital of Al-Rasiyat Holding Company KPSC listed in Boursa Kuwait and completing the acquisition of Aleid Foods Company through a cash capital increase and strategic financing. The company also succeeded in subscribing to the shares of the capital increase of Alrai Media Group.

In addition, the company successfully obtained a non-binding letter of intent from a strategic investor for one of our clients in the oil and gas sector within the Kuwaiti market. The transaction was completed at the beginning of this year. These transactions reinforce our role as trusted financial advisors in Kuwait.

Moreover, the team has a substantial list of promising deals, with management actively working on several IPOs for companies in the automotive, financial services, and services sectors. Regarding mergers and acquisitions, we are working on several operations for companies in the food sector in Kuwait. In a dynamic market environment, the Alternative Investment Management team has succeeded in adopting strategic investments within the real estate sector by partnering with several local and foreign real estate professionals, where it has invested in the development and leasing of various projects, including a residential real estate project in the United States of America and the renovation, leasing, and sale of three Class I

warehouses in France. In addition to leasing properties to one of the leading food sectors in Europe, the management has also worked in collaboration with subsidiaries and associates to improve their financial performance and create added value for these companies through asset restructuring and exit deals. In addition to an influential market share for advisory and investment services which made the National Investments Company a pioneer and distinguished in this field.

This strategy has increased liquidity for these companies, resulting in the distribution of financial surpluses to shareholders. This approach is expected to continue in the coming years.

Al-Mukhaizim praised the supervisory authorities' role in overseeing investment operations and deals, mainly the Capital Markets Authority and the Competition Protection Agency, for helping them complete transactions smoothly and transparently and for their efforts to ensure fair competition among companies operating in the local market.

NIC's funds achieved outstanding returns in 2023; thanks to the company's active strategic approach, it has achieved the optimal and best possible returns for clients in the long term by reducing the risks involved in the stock markets. Zajil Services and Telecommunications Fund, which aims to achieve the highest possible return by investing mainly in the services and telecommunications sectors by the provisions of Islamic Sharia, achieved an excellent positive return, also the Mawarid Industrial and Petroleum Fund, which invests in the shares of local and Arab companies compliant with Islamic Sharia.

In 2023, the Financial Instruments Management team succeeded in signing a Market Maker service agreement with three companies listed on Boursa Kuwait, including companies that we have maintained as part of the Premier Market, bringing the number of businesses that our company offers the role of Market Maker on its shares to 12 companies, which makes our company the third largest investment company that provides market maker service on Boursa Kuwait.

Al-Mukhaizim stressed that NIC could face difficulties, meet challenges in the investment sector, and move forward to achieve more positive and distinguished achievements according to its prudent strategy, financial policy, and the wise and highly professional management of its team.

#### Innovative digital products

Al-Mukhaizim added that NIC always strives for technological excellence, modernizes the IT infrastructure, and enhances cybersecurity measures to protect the company's data and customers, which raised the level of preventive security of the system and compliance with international standards and became a solid and reliable base for all parties involved.

Al-Mukhaizim concluded by confirming that The National Investments Company will continue its constructive successes during 2024, focusing on achieving sustainable growth, expanding digital capabilities, and effectively contributing to enhancing all paths of economic development and providing the best services to satisfy the company's customers and shareholders.

He acknowledged and appreciated the Board of Directors and the company's employees for their efforts and contributions to achieve its objectives while applying its plans and strategic policy. He has also expressed his gratitude to all customers and shareholders for their confidence, wishing everyone success.

## FINANCIAL RESULTS 2023

#### Net Profit

4.1  
KD Million

#### Total Operating Income

13.8  
KD Million

#### Total Shareholders' Equity

173.3  
KD Million

#### Assets Under Management

1.05  
KD Billion

#### Total Assets

249.3  
KD Million



nic.com.kw





# Bader Al-Kharafi appointed new Chairman of Gulf Bank

## Board of Directors elects Al-Kharafi unanimously



Gulf Bank Chairman  
Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

**KUWAIT:** The Board of Directors of Gulf Bank gathered on Monday (March 4, 2024) and unanimously elected Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi as the new Chairman. Abdullateef Abdulaziz Al-Sharikh, a reserve member, was called upon to join the board, with Ali Morad Behbehani appointed as the Vice Chairman. Other members of the board include Ahmed Mohamed Al-Bahar, Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Tawil, Omar Hamad Al-Qenaie, Barak Abdulmohsen Al-Asfour, Fawaz Mohamed Al-Awadi, Abdullah Sayyar Al-Sayyar, Talal Ali Al-Sayegh, and Reem Abdullah Al-Saleh.

The Board of Directors conveyed its

appreciation to Jassim Mustafa Boodai, the former chairman, for his dedicated service, reaffirming its commitment to Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, aimed at enhancing financial and operational performance, and delivering exceptional products and services to customers.

Bringing over two decades of experience in the financial and industrial sectors, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi possesses vast expertise – having assumed leadership positions in numerous local and international companies. He became a member of Gulf Bank's Board in March 2012.

Presently, Al-Kharafi serves as the Vice Chairman and Group CEO of Zain

Group in Kuwait, Vice Chairman of Zain Saudi Arabia, and Vice Chairman of Gulf Cables & Electrical Industries Group Co (K.S.C.P.). He also holds positions as a Board Member and Chairman of the Executive Committee at Boursa Kuwait, Vice Chairman of Heavy Engineering Industries & Shipbuilding Co (HEISCO), and Vice Chairman of National Investments Company (NIC). Furthermore, he serves as a Board Member on the Middle East Advisory Board at Coutts & Co. in the United Kingdom.

Al-Kharafi has been a member of the executive committee of Mohammed Abdulmohsin Al-Kharafi & Sons (Al-Kharafi

Group) and Zain Group. Prior to this, he held roles as Chairman and Managing Director of Gulf Cables & Electrical Industries Group Co (K.S.C.P.) and Chairman of National Investments Company (NIC).

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi earned a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Kuwait University, followed by a Master's degree in Business Administration from London Business School in the United Kingdom. Currently, he is enrolled in the doctorate program in Business Administration at IE Business School (Instituto de Empresa) in Madrid, Spain, where he has completed three years of study.

## Germany braces for fresh rail, air travel strikes

**FRANKFURT:** Germany braced for more travel misery after unions on Monday called for renewed walkouts at Lufthansa and rail operator Deutsche Bahn, amid escalating rows over inflation-busting pay rises. Lufthansa ground staff will stage a two-day strike from Thursday, the powerful Verdi union announced, accusing management at the airline group of showing "no willingness" to come up with an improved offer.

The stoppage would impact passenger services from 0300 GMT on Thursday until 0610 GMT on Saturday, Verdi said. Some 200,000 air travelers would be affected, Lufthansa warned. The strike call comes less than a week after ground staff at Lufthansa's technical support and aviation training units downed tools. That walkout, however, did not affect passenger travel.

A one-day strike by Lufthansa ground staff in Germany last month already affected some 100,000 passengers, with between 80 and 90 percent of the airline's commercial flights grounded.

Verdi's chief negotiator Marvin Reschinsky said it was "regrettable" that passengers would again see their travel plans disrupted. "By ignoring our request to negotiate, Lufthansa is telling us that it will only move when the pressure increases further," he said.

Verdi is seeking pay rises of 12.5 percent for the

workers it represents, or a minimum of 500 euros (\$542) more a month. Lufthansa has offered pay increases over an extended period but not enough to meet Verdi's demands, the union has said.

The airline's human resources chief Michael Nigge-mann said Lufthansa had repeatedly improved its offer and accused Verdi of "deliberately seeking escalation instead of a solution".

The next round of negotiations will take place on March 13 and 14. Germany, Europe's largest economy, has been hit by a spate of strikes across varying sectors in recent months, including transport, the civil service and supermarkets. Pinched by inflation over the last years and in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, workers are demanding higher wages to cope with shrinking purchasing power.

The GDL train drivers union added to the tensions on Monday by announcing a strike wave after negotiations with Deutsche Bahn over higher pay and a shorter work week broke down. Talks with management "have failed", GDL boss Claus Weselsky told a press conference. The first strike would last for 35 hours and begin at 1700 GMT Wednesday for cargo services and at 0100 GMT on Thursday for passenger rail, he added.

As well as a salary hike to help train drivers cope with higher living costs, the GDL union is pushing for a reduced working week of 35 hours, down from 38 hours, with no loss in wages. Deutsche Bahn says it has made concessions amounting to up to 13 percent more pay, as well as the option of cutting the work week by one hour from 2026. "The first strike will last for 35 hours so everyone in the country can feel what we are talking about," Weselsky said, adding that further strikes would follow. "We are starting a so-called wave



FRANKFURT: Germany's powerful Verdi union on Monday called on Lufthansa ground staff to stage a fresh two-day strike this week.

of strikes," he said, which will be announced "when we think the time is right" and no longer 48 hours in advance as has been the case in the past. As a result, "rail is no longer a reliable means of transport", he added.

Deutsche Bahn's human resources director Martin Seiler sharply condemned the union's announcement, accusing GDL of "stubbornly and selfishly" insisting

on its maximum demands even though these were "unachievable". A multi-day walkout by train drivers in January caused travel disruption for thousands of passengers and heaped pressure on supply chains already strained by tensions in the Middle East. Deutsche Bahn estimates that each strike day costs the German economy "a low two-digit million figure". –AFP

# Invitation to the 65<sup>th</sup> Ordinary and 43<sup>rd</sup> Extraordinary General Assembly Meetings of Gulf Bank (KSCP) Shareholders

Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. is pleased to invite its esteemed shareholders to its sixty-fifth meeting of the Ordinary General Assembly and the forty-third meeting of the Extraordinary General Assembly, to be held at the Bank's Head Office located in Sharq, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Street, at 2:00 pm on Saturday, 23 March 2024, to discuss the items listed on the two below agendas.

Esteemed shareholders wishing to attend are kindly requested to contact the Shares Unit - Head Office on the following numbers: 22082246 - 99509132, to receive their invitation cards, Powers of Attorney, a copy of the Bank's financial statements for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 and the meetings' agendas during the official working hours.

Based on the instructions of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the invitation cards delivered by hand will be given only to the shareholder in person or his representative by means of a written letter from the respective shareholder. In the event that the shareholder is a company, the invitation shall be delivered to the company's representative by means of an official letter signed by one of the company's authorized signatories and stamped with the company's seal.

Esteemed shareholders wishing to participate through the electronic system - as per policies and procedures manual of the eAGM Platform - are kindly requested to visit the website of Kuwait Clearing Company (www.maqaas.com) and carry out the necessary actions to subscribe to the eAGM in preparation for their participation and electronic voting on the two agendas' items.

AGM Right of Attendance and Corporate Action Schedules	
Attendees' Cum Date	Tuesday 05 March 2024
Right of Attendance Date	Sunday 10 March 2024
AGM Date	Saturday 23 March 2024
Cum- Date (The final trading day of a stock loaded with dues)	Wednesday 03 April 2024
Ex-Date	Thursday 04 April 2024
Record Date	Monday 08 April 2024
Distribution date	Thursday 18 April 2024

**Agenda of the Ordinary Annual General Assembly Meeting No. 65 of Gulf Bank (KSCP) Shareholders for the Financial Year Ended 31/12/2023:**

- Presenting & ratifying the Board of Directors Report for the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Presenting & ratifying the Auditors Report for the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Presenting the violations report and penalties imposed by regulatory authorities on Gulf Bank during the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Discussing & approving the Financial Statements for the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Approving the deduction of 10% to be transferred to the Statutory Reserve in the total amount of KD 7,486,000
- Discussing the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute dividends for the FY ended on 31/12/2023 as follows:
  - Cash dividends at 12% (twelve percent) i.e., 12% (twelve Fils) per share after excluding the treasury shares. The shareholders registered in the company's records as of the end of the record day, set as 08/04/2024 are entitled to these cash dividends.
  - 5% free bonus shares (five percent) of issued and paid-up capital, by issuing 181,071,528 new shares to be distributed as bonus shares to the shareholders registered in the company's records as of the end of the record day, set as 08/04/2024, each according to their percentage of ownership (by five shares per each 100 shares), this is based on the Board of Directors' resolution dated 24/01/2024 to increase the bank's issued and paid-up capital from KD 362,143,057.100 (Three Hundred and Sixty-Two Million, One Hundred and Forty-Three Thousand, Fifty-Seven Kuwaiti Dinars and 100 Fils), to KD 380,250,209.900 (Three Hundred and Eighty Million, Two Hundred Fifty Thousand, Two Hundred and Nine Kuwaiti Dinars and 900 Fils) and cover the amount of increase resulting from the issued and paid-up capital amounting to KD 18,107,152.800 (Eighteen Millions and One Hundred Seven Thousand and One Hundred Fifty-Two Kuwaiti Dinars and 800 Fils) from the retained earnings account as of 31/12/2023, then registering the increase in the issued and paid-up capital in the commercial registry and completing the registration procedures by amending article (4) of the Memorandum of Association (MOA) and Article (5) of the Articles of Association (AOA) of the Bank, and authorize the Board of Directors to dispose of the remaining fractional shares after distribution as well as to dispose of any fractional shares and/or fractional earnings which could have been distributed in previous financial years to the favor of the Bank.
- Cash dividends to be distributed and bonus shares distribution to be included in the bank's shareholders records based on the following timetable:
 

Cum Date (The final trading day of a stock loaded with dues)	03/04/2024
Ex Date	04/04/2024
Record Date	08/04/2024
Distribution Date	18/04/2024

- Authorizing the Board of Directors to amend these foregoing dates in case they are not confirmed at least eight working days prior to the record date.
- Discussing the authorization of the Board of Directors to distribute Semi-Annual dividends for the FY ending 31/12/2024, according to the same applicable standards in the annual dividend distributions, determining their amount and percentage, taking all procedures and obtaining all other necessary approvals from regulatory authorities or others, and determining the timetable for this distribution whenever it deems appropriate, provided that this distribution is based on real profits and in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles, and that it has no effect on the company's paid-up capital. Authorizing the Board of Directors to amend this timetable in case it wasn't confirmed at least eight working days prior to the record date.
- Discussing the disbursement of the Board Members' remuneration (Independent and Non- Independent) of KD 295,000 (Two Hundred and Ninety-Five Thousand Kuwaiti Dinars Only) for the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Discussing the authorization of the Board of Directors, for a period of 18 months, to buy, sell or dispose of a maximum of 10% (ten percent) of the Bank's total shares, in accordance with the controls and terms stipulated by the relevant law, regulations, resolutions and instructions of regulators in this respect.

10. Discussing the authorization of the Board of Directors to:

- issue bonds of all types (whether directly, or indirectly via a special purpose vehicle(s) established inside or outside Kuwait) in Kuwaiti Dinars or any other foreign currency as they deem appropriate, including without limitation, the issuance of perpetual bonds, in and/or outside the State of Kuwait, without exceeding the maximum limit permitted by law, or the equivalent in foreign currencies, in accordance with all applicable instructions, directives and/or regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait, b) enter into any relevant transaction documentation related to the issuance of the bonds (including, where applicable, the granting of guarantees to support issuance of the bonds or assume any obligations thereunder), c) determine the type of those bonds to be issued, their currency, duration, nominal value, rate of interest thereon, repayment maturity, means of coverage, rules of offering and depreciation, and all terms and conditions thereof, d) obtain any and all relevant approvals from the competent regulators (whether located in or outside of Kuwait, as applicable), and e) agree to the choice of arbitration as a method of dispute resolution in any of the transaction documentation in relation to the issuance of the bonds and any other documents ancillary thereto. The Board of Directors may delegate their authority to any third party, as they deem appropriate, to implement all the above or part thereof.
- Discussing the authorization to grant loans or advances in the current account, or providing facilities, letters of guarantee and all banking transactions to the Board Members - in accordance with the same terms and conditions applied by the Bank for other customers - subject to the provisions of Article (69) of Law No. 32 of 1968 concerning Currency, the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Organization of the Banking Business.
- Reviewing the transactions concluded with the related parties during the FY ended on 31/12/2023 and authorize the Board of Directors to deal with related parties during the FY ending 31/12/2024, up to the date of convening the annual ordinary general assembly of the Bank's shareholders that will review the ordinary agenda for the FY ending on 31/12/2024.
- Discussing the release of the Board of Directors with respect to their financial, legal, and administrative behaviours during the FY ended on 31/12/2023.
- Elect the Independent and Non- Independent Members of the Bank's new Board of Directors for the next term of three years' period.
- Appoint/re-appoint the auditors of the Bank for the FY ending 31/12/2024 and authorize the Board to determine their fees.

**Agenda of Gulf Bank (KSCP) Shareholders' Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting No. 43:**

**1. Approval to amend Article (70) of the Articles of Association (AOA), as follows:**

**Prior to amendment:**

"A percentage of no less than 10% (Ten Percent) shall be deducted annually from the net profits in accordance with a resolution issued by the Ordinary General Assembly based on a proposition by the Board of Directors, to be allocated to the statutory reserve.

The statutory reserve may only be utilized to cover the company's losses or to secure the distribution of dividends to shareholders of up to 5% (Five Percent) of the paid-up capital in the years in which the company's profits do not allow the distribution of this percentage, due to the absence of a voluntary reserve that allows the distribution of this percentage of dividends.

The amount which was deducted from the statutory reserve shall be returned to it when the following year's profit is permissible unless this reserve exceeds half of the issued capital.

The General Assembly may suspend this deduction if the statutory reserve exceeds half of the issued capital of the company. It may also approve the use of the amount that exceeded this limit in whichever ways it deems appropriate to the favor of the company and its shareholders.

The Ordinary General Assembly may, upon the proposal of the Board of Directors, distribute dividends to shareholders at the end of the financial year, or semi-annually. It is also permissible, upon a decision from the Ordinary General Assembly, to be renewed annually, to authorize the Board of Directors in advance to distribute dividends on a semi-annual basis and to determine the timetable for this distribution. In order for this distribution to be valid and in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles, it must be made from actual profits provided this distribution shall have no effect on the paid-up capital of the company."

**After amendment:**

"A percentage of no less than 10% (Ten Percent) shall be deducted annually from the net profits in accordance with a resolution issued by the Ordinary General Assembly based on a proposition by the Board of Directors, to be allocated to the statutory reserve.

The statutory reserve may only be utilized to cover the company's losses or to secure the distribution of dividends to shareholders of up to 5% (Five Percent) of the paid-up capital in the years in which the company's profits do not allow the distribution of this percentage, due to the absence of a voluntary reserve that allows the distribution of this percentage of dividends.

The amount which was deducted from the statutory reserve shall be returned to it when the following year's profit is permissible unless this reserve exceeds half of the issued capital.

The General Assembly may suspend this deduction if the statutory reserve exceeds half of the issued capital of the company. It may also approve the use of the amount that exceeded this limit in whichever ways it deems appropriate to the favor of the company and its shareholders.

In addition, (1%) of the company's net profit shall be deducted to the favor of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

The Ordinary General Assembly may, upon the proposal of the Board of Directors, distribute dividends to shareholders at the end of the financial year, or semi-annually. It is also permissible, upon a decision from the Ordinary General Assembly, to be renewed annually, to authorize the Board of Directors in advance to distribute dividends on a semi-annual basis and to determine the timetable for this distribution. In order for this distribution to be valid and in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles, it must be made from actual profits provided this distribution shall have no effect on the paid-up capital of the company."

**In the event where quorum for any of the ordinary or extraordinary general assembly meetings could not be achieved, the meeting(s) (as the case may be) shall be postponed for a period of one week whereby such postponed meeting(s) is/are held on 30 March 2024 at the same place mentioned above at 2:00 pm and after. This Announcement shall be considered an invitation to the postponed meeting(s) without the need for any new invitation, in accordance with Article (143) of Law No. (1) of 2016 promulgating the Companies Law.**

Chairman of the Board





# Boursa Kuwait continues efforts for women's economic empowerment

## Fireside chat aims to promote inclusion of women in leadership positions

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait hosted a fireside chat on women's economic empowerment by Hedwige Nuyens, the Managing Director of the International Banking Federation and the Chair of the European Women on Boards, a non-profit organization that supports women's empowerment and gender diversity in corporate boards. Anne Koistinen, the Ambassador of the European Union, also participated, giving a keynote speech to the crowd which included employees from Boursa Kuwait and Kuwait Clearing Company, as well as representatives from several listed companies.

Held as part of the European Union and Boursa Kuwait's commitment to economically empowering women, the event was part of a series of engagements to exchange best practices on increasing women's participation in senior leadership roles, including C-Suite and Board levels. In addition to the chat, the EU Delegation also organized public and private talks with like-minded Kuwaiti organizations and private sector companies on issues related to gender diversity and inclusion as well as environmental, social, and governance criteria (ESGs).

During the chat, Nuyens drew on her extensive experience in mentoring numerous women throughout her remarkable thirty-year career. She also shared insights gained from her extensive advocacy for gender diversity, highlighted by her role as a Member of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council.

A recipient of the 'Businesswomen of the Year' award in 1999, Nuyens also shared her experiences from her role as the Chair of European Women on Boards - where she actively works towards promoting gender diversity in C-Suite and Board positions throughout Europe - as well as her esteemed positions as the elected chairwoman of BNP Paribas' Women network.

Anne Koistinen, the Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Kuwait, hailed Boursa Kuwait for their contribution in organizing the event, saying: "In our collaborative efforts with Kuwait, we recognize the importance of empowering women and embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across

all sectors. These values are central to our shared vision for a prosperous future and pivotal in driving sustainable development and innovation. By working together, we aim to unlock the full potential of every individual, regardless of gender, to contribute to the growth and resilience of our societies."

She added, "The European Union remains committed to supporting Kuwait in these endeavors, building on our strong partnership to foster environments where diversity is celebrated, and every voice is heard. I want to thank Boursa Kuwait for hosting this event and I hope to see more private sector entities follow the stock exchange's lead to make a positive impact in the community."

Emphasizing the need for organizations to embrace diversity and inclusion, Hedwige Nuyens, Chair of the European Women on Boards and Managing Director of the International Banking Federation, said: "Empowering women and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just moral imperatives but are critical for the growth and innovation of our societies. Through collaboration, mentorship, and targeted initiatives, we aim to break the glass ceiling and ensure that women have equal opportunities to access senior decision-making roles. By doing so, we not only champion women's empowerment but also enrich our communities with diverse perspectives and leadership styles that are essential for addressing the complex challenges of today's world."

"As proud supporters of the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles, Boursa Kuwait has long been an unwavering advocate for women's empowerment and gender equality since its inception. Over the past few years, the company has championed women in their pursuit of leadership roles, a dedication that not only helps enrich society with diverse perspectives but also drives economic growth and development," said Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Noura Al-Abdulkareem.

She added, "I would like to thank Her Excellency Ms Anne Koistinen and Ms Hedwige Nuyens for their invaluable contributions to the success of this enlightening event and look forward to further collaborations in the future as we continue to champion



Boursa Kuwait continues efforts for women's economic empowerment and promoting the inclusion of women in leadership positions.

initiatives that align with our commitment to foster a long-lasting positive change."

The fireside chat was organized as part of Boursa Kuwait's activities related to women's empowerment and in commemoration of International Women's Day. Held this year under the theme of "Invest in women. Accelerate progress", the event aims to inspire market participants to invest in women, transforming challenges into opportunities and shaping a better future for society. The exchange is poised to join over 100 exchanges in the UN Women and World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) initiative to ring the bell for women's empowerment for the seventh consecutive year, raising awareness of this im-

portant issue and promoting inclusion and diversity among listed companies and private sector entities.

Boursa Kuwait's efforts in championing women's empowerment and integrating DEI policies into its operations and broader community reflect a strategic and ethical commitment to fostering an inclusive, equitable business environment. These initiatives are crucial for driving social change, enhancing corporate governance, and achieving sustainable economic growth by leveraging the full potential of a diverse workforce. Through these actions, Boursa Kuwait not only sets a benchmark for other companies but also aligns itself with global best practices in corporate responsibility.

## Stock markets waver, crude prices edge up

LONDON: Global stock markets wavered on Monday but Tokyo closed at an all-time high, while oil prices rose slightly after a decision by major crude producers to extend output cuts. Wall Street opened lower after the Nasdaq and S&P 500 closed at all-time highs last week while European equities were mixed in afternoon deals. Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 stocks index closed above 40,000 points for the first time.

Tokyo is enjoying a record-run higher thanks to Wall Street rallies, robust corporate earnings and optimism over artificial intelligence, analysts said. "Japan's stock market is also being boosted by the weak yen which is making exports cheaper and more attractive to overseas buyers," said David Morrison, senior market analyst at investment platform Trade Nation. In New York and European markets, investors waited for fresh signals on interest rates from the US and eurozone central banks later this week as well as a pre-election UK budget.

The European Central Bank is expected to keep interest rates unchanged again at a regular meeting on Thursday as official want to ensure inflation is on a clear downward path before they cut borrowing costs. Investors will be also looking to Fed chairman Jerome Powell's testimony to Congress and US job figures later this week for indications on when the US central bank might cut its own rates.

"We don't expect the chair to stray very far from the Fed's recent messaging—officials are in a 'wait-and-see' mode as there's still a lot of ambiguity in the data," said John Briggs, global head of desk strategy at NatWest Markets. Elsewhere in Asia, Hong Kong's stock market finished flat Monday and Shanghai closed higher ahead of the start of China's annual legislative conclave, with officials expressing concern over the nation's struggling economy and youth unemployment. On the commodities side, the international oil benchmark, Brent crude, rose 0.3 percent to \$83.79 after falling earlier in the day. The modest increase came one day after Saudi Arabia, Russia and several other OPEC+ members announced extensions to production cuts first announced in 2023.

The extension to mid-2024 is part of an agreement among oil producers to boost prices following economic uncertainty. Monday's weak price movement was due to the fact they had already risen last week on expectations of the extension of the cuts, said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

"There is also some conjecture that the decision to extend those cuts could be a tacit indication that demand is relatively weak," O'Hare said. Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading platform XTB, said the average price of oil has been just over \$80 in the year to date so far.

"The oil price is anchored around \$80 per barrel because there is ample oil supply, even with OPEC cuts, and demand growth is set to slow, which are factors that OPEC can't control," Brooks said. — AFP

## OPEC+ members extend cuts to oil production

VIENNA: Several OPEC+ countries announced Sunday the extension of additional voluntary cuts of 2.2 million barrels per day for the second quarter of 2024. A statement by the OPEC secretariat said "the announcements of several OPEC+ countries extending additional voluntary cuts of 2.2 million barrels per day, aimed at supporting the stability and balance of oil markets." The statement added, these voluntary cuts are calculated from the 2024 required production level as per the 35th OPEC ministerial meeting held on June 4, 2023, and are in addition to the voluntary cuts previously announced in April 2023 and later extended until the end of 2024.

"These additional voluntary cuts are announced by the following OPEC+ countries: Saudi Arabia (1,000,000 barrels per day), Iraq (220,000 barrels per day), United Arab Emirates (163,000 barrels per day), Kuwait (135,000 barrels per day), Kazakhstan (82,000 barrels per day), Algeria (51,000 barrels per day), and Oman (42,000 barrels per day) for the second quarter of 2024. Afterwards, in order to support market stability, these voluntary cuts will be returned gradually subject to market conditions. The above will be in addition to the announced voluntary cut by the Russian Federation of 471,000 barrels per

day for the same period (second quarter of 2024), which will be from crude oil production and exports as follows: In April 350,000 barrels per day from production and 121,000 barrels per day from exports. In May 400,000 barrels per day from production and 71,000 barrels per day from exports. In June 471,000 barrels per day totally from production. Russia's voluntary production cut is in addition to the voluntary cut of 500,000 barrels per day previously announced in April 2023, which extends until the end of December 2024. The export cut will be made from the average export levels of the months of May and June of 2023.

A Saudi Arabian energy ministry source announced, Riyadh "will extend its voluntary cut of one million barrels per day, which was implemented in July 2023, until the end of the second quarter of 2024," the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported. "Afterwards, in order to support market stability, these additional cut volumes will be returned gradually subject to market conditions."

In October 2022, OPEC+ agreed to reduce output by two million barrels per day, a move that fuelled tensions with US President Joe Biden's administration, which said it amounted to siding with Russia in the war in Ukraine. Sunday's announcement means Saudi Arabia's production will stay at roughly nine million bpd, well below its capacity of 12 million bpd.

Energy giant Aramco, the jewel of the Saudi economy, has pledged to achieve "operational net-zero" carbon emissions by 2050, which does not include the emissions from customers



Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud gestures upon his arrival at the OPEC International Seminar in Vienna in this file photo. — AFP

burning its products. In January, Aramco made the surprising announcement that the energy ministry had ordered it to maintain production capacity at 12 million barrels per day, abandoning a target of 13 million bpd by 2027.

Officials did not explain the decision at the time, but Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman later told an energy conference that it was spurred by the fact that "we're transitioning".

That means Aramco would increasingly pursue investments in other energy forms such as gas and renewables, he said. Aramco reported record profits in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent oil prices soaring, allowing Saudi Arabia to record its first budget surplus in nearly a decade.

Lower prices resulted in year-on-year profit drops of 23 percent in the

third quarter, 38 percent in the second quarter and 19.25 percent in the first quarter of last year, with fourth quarter earnings yet to be announced. Last week, Riyadh-based firm Jadwa Investment said Saudi authorities were "likely to keep oil production in check in the face of a weak demand outlook", predicting that last year's cuts would roll over to the end of the third quarter. This approach would ensure Brent Crude sells for \$81 per barrel in 2024, Jadwa said. Analysts often say Riyadh needs oil prices to clear the \$80 threshold to balance its budget, though the recent various production cuts may have pushed that figure higher. Riyadh is currently predicting budget deficits through 2026 as it ramps up spending on reform initiatives. — Agencies

## EU hits Apple with \$1.9bn fine over streaming laws

BRUSSELS: The EU on Monday hit Apple with a 1.8 billion-euro-fine (\$1.9 billion) for violating the bloc's laws by preventing music streaming services from informing users about subscription options outside of its App Store.

The iPhone maker immediately vowed to appeal the first ever antitrust fine slapped on Apple by Brussels, the culmination of a case triggered by a complaint by Swedish music streaming giant Spotify.

The European Commission said it "found that Apple applied restrictions on app developers preventing them from informing iOS users about alternative and cheaper music subscription services available outside of the app". "This is illegal under EU antitrust rules," the EU's powerful antitrust regulator said.

"Apple's conduct, which lasted for almost ten years, may have led many iOS users to pay significantly higher prices for music streaming subscriptions because of the high commission fee imposed by Apple on developers and passed on to consumers," it added. Spotify's complaint in 2019 triggered a broad commission investigation into the iPhone maker in 2021, but Brussels narrowed its probe last year to focus on Apple's actions to prevent apps from giving users information about rival music subscription options. "For a decade, Apple abused its dominant position in the market for the distribution of music streaming apps

through the App Store," commission vice president Margrethe Vestager said in a statement. "We have ordered Apple to remove the necessary provisions and to refrain from similar practices in the future," Vestager told reporters. Apple slammed the commission's decision and said it would appeal.

"The decision was reached despite the Commission's failure to uncover any credible evidence of consumer harm, and ignores the realities of a market that is thriving, competitive, and growing fast," Apple said in a statement. "While we respect the European Commission, the facts simply don't support this decision. And as a result, Apple will appeal," the company added. Despite the scale of the penalty, critics point out that even fines above hundreds of millions of euros pale in comparison to how much Apple makes. In the last three months of 2023, Apple reported \$33.92 billion in profits. Brussels has already hit Google with penalties of around eight billion euros in the past few years, although the US-based firm is challenging the fines in EU courts.

But the EU expects the fine will lead Apple to stop limiting access to rival streaming services—all the more since it will also be obliged to do so under a new law known as the Digital Markets Act that it must adhere to by March 7. Google owner Alphabet, Amazon, TikTok's parent company ByteDance, Meta and Microsoft must also comply. The DMA gives the commission the power to fine companies up to 10 percent of global revenue for any violations or 20 percent for repeat offenders. Apple rejects Spotify claims and points to the streaming giant's market dominance in the online music field. Spotify has more than 600 million monthly users, a third of them are paying subscribers, according to the com-



This picture in Toulouse, shows a screen displaying the Apple logo and the European flag. — AFP

pany's latest figures published last month.

Apple Music, a music streaming service, represents eight percent of the European market, the company says, compared with Spotify's more than 50 percent share. Apple also says Spotify has paid them nothing—except a \$99 developer program fee—although the iPhone maker claims to have played a significant part in the firm's success.

It is not the first time Apple and Spotify have knocked heads. Spotify has been one of the most vocal critics of Apple's changes to its App Store as part of compliance with the EU's DMA law. As part of the changes, the company will let rivals build app stores for iPhones and allow payment services beyond Apple Pay on the devices. — AFP



Business



Marzouq Alghanim, Tom Lee and other officials during the inauguration of the new showroom.



# MG Adel Alghanim Automotive opens new showroom in Jahra

## We plan to open more showrooms in Kuwait: Alghanim

KUWAIT: The Jahra governorate witnessed a special event with the opening of the new MG Adel Alghanim Automotive showroom. The event was attended by prominent figures, including Marzouq Alghanim, President of the Sons of Alghanim Group, and Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG.

The opening of this new showroom is part of Adel Alghanim Automotive's ambitious plans to expand its network of showrooms and provide integrated services to its customers throughout Kuwait. The new showroom includes a spacious display area showcasing the latest range of MG cars, in addition to a service center and a spare parts center, offering a comprehensive experience for customers in the Jahra Governorate and surrounding areas.

In his speech on the occasion, Marzouq Alghanim emphasized the importance of opening this new showroom, saying: "We at the Sons of Alghanim Group believe in the importance of serving our customers in different regions, and we are pleased to open the new MG Adel Alghanim showroom in Jahra today. Through this showroom, we aim to provide a distinctive experience for our customers, where we give them the opportunity to see the latest models of MG cars and benefit from maintenance and spare parts services with the highest quality standards." Alghanim also pointed out the company's future plans, saying: "Our ambition is not limited

to opening this showroom, but we seek to strengthen our presence in the Kuwaiti market by opening more showrooms in the near future to be as close as possible to our customers. We affirm our keenness to provide high-quality MG cars at competitive prices to increase our market share."

For his part, Tom Lee stressed the company's commitment to leadership in the fields of technology and innovation, saying: "At MG, we aspire to be leaders in the field of technology, development, and innovation. We are committed to providing cars that are distinguished by their high quality and advanced features and offering them to customers at competitive prices. We also affirm our commitment to providing the best customer experience throughout Kuwait, whether through our network of showrooms or maintenance centers spread across different regions."

It is worth noting that MG Adel Alghanim Motors currently has three showrooms distributed in the areas of Rai, Shuwaikh and Jahra, in addition to 13 maintenance centers throughout Kuwait. The company offers a wide range of MG cars, including sedans, sports utility vehicles (SUVs), and electric cars. These cars are distinguished by their elegant designs, advanced technologies, and competitive prices, making them an ideal choice for customers looking for quality and exceptional value.



The new MG Adel Alghanim Automotive showroom.

## Forbes lists top 10 richest people in the world

WASHINGTON: In a society and era fueled by ambition and a drive for entrepreneurship, there is a distinguished set of individuals that's achieved unimaginable fortunes. These extraordinary leaders, who possess vision and innovation, have ascended to the highest echelons of success, elevating themselves to the exclusive ranks of the world's wealthiest individuals.

And that's no small feat. After all, the net worth of the top 10 richest people surpasses the GDP of numerous nations. Today, their wealth is primarily concentrated in technology, finance, and retail industries. And the growing wealth disparity between them and the less privileged is a significant concern for people worldwide.

This article unveils the identities of the top 10 richest people globally, shedding light on their remarkable accomplishments, entrepreneurial aptitude, and profound influence on the global economy. This ranked list is sourced from Forbes.

### 1) Bernard Arnault & Family

Age: 74  
Residence: Paris  
Citizenship: France  
Bernard Arnault, the richest person in the world, is the CEO and chairman at Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH), the world's largest luxury goods company encompassing approximately 70 renowned fashion and cosmetics brands. Notable names within its portfolio include Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Moët & Chandon, and Sephora. In January 2021, LVMH completed the acquisition of jeweler Tiffany & Co for a staggering \$15.8 billion. Arnault's five children contribute to various sectors within the expansive LVMH empire. In January 2023, he appointed his daughter Delphine to lead Dior, the group's second-largest brand.

### 2) Elon Musk

Age: 52  
Residence: Austin, Texas  
Citizenship: US  
Elon Musk is now the second richest person in the world. He is the CEO of several prominent companies, including electric car manufacturer Tesla and space exploration company SpaceX. He currently possesses a 23 percent stake in Tesla. A significant portion of his wealth, around two-thirds, is tied to the success of Tesla. Musk made headlines in October 2022 when he purchased Twitter for \$44 billion. Musk led Tesla to its initial public offering in 2010. The company experienced significant growth in market capitalization during 2020 and 2021, propelling Musk to the position of the world's top 10 richest people in September 2021. At its peak in November 2021, Musk's fortune reached an astounding \$320 billion.

### 3) Jeff Bezos

Age: 60  
Residence: Medina, Washington  
Citizenship: US  
In July 2021, Jeff Bezos decided to give up his role as CEO of the e-commerce powerhouse Amazon while still maintaining his position as chairman. During the same month, he embarked on a space voyage aboard a rocket developed by Blue Origin, a private space exploration

company he established and generously funded with billions of dollars.

### 4) Mark Zuckerberg

Age: 39  
Residence: Palo Alto, California  
Citizenship: US  
Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Meta Platforms, started its flagship social media platform Facebook in 2004 when he was only 19. He was a computer science and psychology student at Harvard University. Facebook was created to match the names of students on campus with their photos. In 2006, Facebook opened to everyone at least 13 years old with a valid email address. In May 2012, Zuckerberg took the company public, and by December 2016, he was ranked 10th on the Forbes list of The World's Most Powerful People. Currently, Zuckerberg owns about 13 percent of the company's stock. The 39-year-old techie is married to Priscilla Chan and is a father of three daughters. Together with his wife, he is spending \$3 billion in an attempt to end, cure or manage all diseases by the year 2100.

### 5) Larry Ellison

Age: 79  
Residence: Lanai, Hawaii  
Citizenship: US  
Larry Ellison co-founded the software firm Oracle in 1977 and held the position of its CEO until 2014. Currently, he assumes the company's chairman and Chief Technology Officer roles. In 2012, Ellison made headlines when he acquired the Hawaiian island of Lanai for a sum of \$300 million. Ellison also ventured into investments, including a substantial stake in Tesla, where he served on the board of directors from 2018 until 2022.

### 6) Warren Buffett

Age: 93  
Residence: Omaha, Nebraska  
Citizenship: US  
Warren Buffett, widely recognized as the "Oracle of Omaha," is one of history's most accomplished investors. He is the head of Berkshire Hathaway, an investment conglomerate with a diverse portfolio encompassing numerous companies, such as insurance provider Geico, battery manufacturer Duracell, and restaurant chain Dairy Queen. In 2010, Buffett and Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates established the Giving Pledge initiative, which urges billionaires to donate at least 50 percent of their wealth to charitable organizations. Demonstrating his unwavering philanthropic commitment, Buffett has expressed his intention to donate 99 percent of his fortune.

### Top 10 richest people in the world

Name & Rank	Net Worth (in \$ Billions)	Source of Wealth	Country
#1 Bernard Arnault & family	\$230.5	LVMH	France
#2 Elon Musk	\$210.5	Tesla, SpaceX	United States
#3 Jeff Bezos	\$199.1	Amazon	United States
#4 Mark Zuckerberg	\$176.1	Facebook	United States
#5 Larry Ellison	\$142.2	Oracle	United States
#6 Warren Buffett	\$134.1	Berkshire Hathaway	United States
#7 Bill Gates	\$128.4	Microsoft	United States
#8 Steve Ballmer	\$123.3	Microsoft	United States
#09 Mukesh Ambani	\$117.5	Reliance Industries	India
#10 Larry Page	\$115.1	Google	United States

### 7) Bill Gates

Age: 68  
Residence: Medina, Washington  
Citizenship: US  
In 1987, Forbes first recognized Gates as a billionaire. From 1995 to 2017, he maintained the title of the world's richest person, with brief exceptions in 2008 and from 2010 to 2013. In 2021, Gates and Melinda French Gates finalized their divorce, with Melinda receiving at least \$6 billion in stocks as part of the settlement. According to Forbes' estimates, Gates' fortune experienced a modest increase of approximately \$500 million from May 1 to June 1, 2023, allowing him to ascend one spot in the rankings to secure the fifth position.

### 8) Steve Ballmer

Age: 67  
Residence: Hunts Point, Washington  
Citizenship: US  
A Harvard University classmate of Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer, assumed the role of CEO at Microsoft from 2000 to 2014. His journey with Microsoft began in 1980 when he joined as the company's 30th employee, having dropped out of the MBA at Stanford University. In the same year that Ballmer retired from Microsoft, he made headlines by acquiring the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team for a staggering \$2 billion, setting a new benchmark for the highest price paid for an NBA team at that time.

### 9) Mukesh Ambani

Age: 66  
Residence: Mumbai, India  
Citizenship: India  
Mukesh Dhirubhai Ambani is an Indian billionaire businessman. He is the chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries, India's most valuable company by market value. With an estimated net worth of \$117.5 billion according to Forbes, he is the richest person in Asia.

### 10) Larry Page

Age: 50  
Residence: Palo Alto, California  
Citizenship: US  
Larry Page and his fellow Stanford PhD student Sergey Brin co-founded Google in 1998. Initially, Page held the position of CEO until 2001 and later resumed the role from 2011 to 2015. Currently, he serves as a member of the board of Alphabet, the parent company of Google, and retains significant control over the company as a major shareholder. Additionally, Page played a key role as a founding investor in Planetary Resources: a company focused on space exploration.

## Global economy is remarkably resilient: IMF chief

VIENNA: The global economy has proven to be remarkably resilient, thanks to the strong macroeconomic fundamentals and effective policies built over the years, said IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. "Looking forward, we do face a choice. We can choose the path of instability and confrontation. Or we can choose the path of cooperation and shared prosperity," she said at a conference in Vienna.



Kristalina Georgieva

She said the conference takes place on the 80th anniversary of the creation of International Monetary Fund and the 75th anniversary of Austria's joining as its member. The Joint Vienna Institute, a joint undertaking of the OeNB, and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Finance, and the Fund, has provided training to public sector officials from countries in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia for more than 30 years. The Institute plays a crucial role in strengthening economic policies through the training it provides and by serving as a hub for networking and peer learning among policymakers. It has also been a great platform to collaborate on capacity building with other partners such as the EBRD, the EIB, the OECD, the World Bank, the WTO, and the European Commission.

Vienna also hosts the IMF's regional office for the Western Balkans, which allows us to maintain close engagement with countries in the region, along with donors, other international institutions, and the Austrian government, which is an important trade and development partner of the Western Balkan region.

"The Vienna Initiative, born out of the global financial crisis, has been central to promoting regional financial stability. Let me also recognize the significance of your discussions today on the past, present and future role of the IMF for global economic cooperation and stability," she said.

She said in 1944 the IMF was forged from the ruins of two world wars. After the Bretton Woods, the world saw dramatic increases in global integration and wellbeing, for which the IMF played a key role — by promoting the stability of the international monetary system, facilitating international trade, supporting sustainable economic growth and employment, and through all this helping to reduce poverty, she said.

"Today, we are grappling with global mega-trends such as climate change and the demographic transition, as well as disruptive technologies such as AI and digital currencies. At this pivotal moment in history, the IMF's mandate is more important than ever. We stand for monetary cooperation and open trade. We stand for strong institutions and sound policies. We stand for a world of sustainable growth that creates jobs and protects the vulnerable," she pointed out. She said the Fund is working hard to help low-income countries build strong institutions, including by promoting central bank independence and credible macroeconomic frameworks. "We are working with other international organizations and the creditor community to help countries address excessive debt burdens," she added.



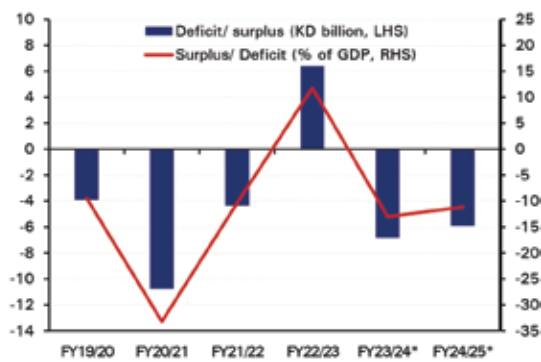
## Business

## NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

# Kuwait FY24/25 draft budget sees lower spending, but huge deficit

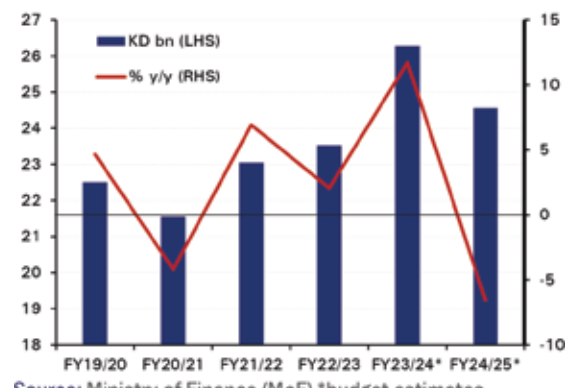
## Spending cut part of a broader reform package needs

Chart 1: Fiscal balance (actual/budgeted)



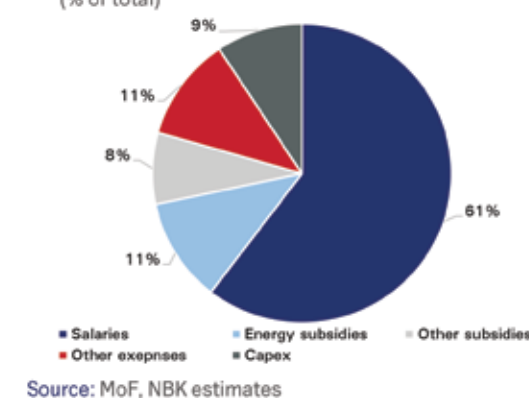
Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF) \*budget estimates

Chart 2: Government expenditure (budgeted)



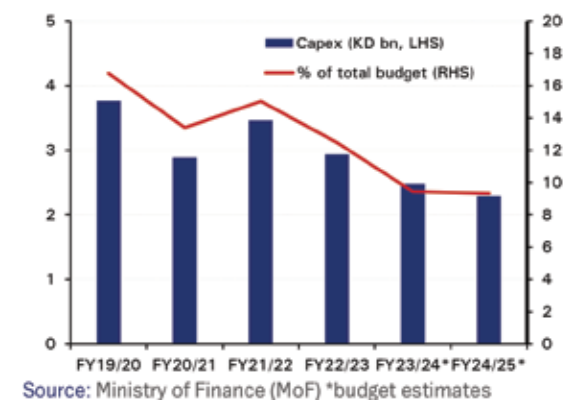
Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF) \*budget estimates

Chart 3: FY24/25 budget spending breakdown



Source: MoF, NBK estimates

Chart 4: Capital spending (budgeted)



Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF) \*budget estimates

**KUWAIT:** The government's draft budget for the fiscal year starting April (FY24/25) projects another large deficit, of KD 5.9 billion. The deficit is smaller than the one projected for FY23/24 thanks mostly to a drop in expenditures linked to the absence of one-off items. This more than offsets a projected drop in revenues resulting from lower expected oil production, while potential new revenue-enhancing measures do not appear to be included.

We expect the fiscal position to come in better than budgeted next year due to a combination of traditional below-target spending outturns and above-target oil prices. Still, this could be the ninth deficit in the past ten years, underlining the continued challenge in securing long-term fiscal sustainability. Absent fresh debt issuance or other measures, the squeeze on the government's liquid reserves will continue to grow.

Expenditures in FY2024/25 are budgeted at KD 24.6 billion, a drop of 6.6 percent on the previous year's budget. Spending on all major items was reduced: subsidies (-22 percent b/b to KD 4.7 billion); salaries (-0.8 percent to KD 14.8 billion); capex (-7.7 percent to KD 2.5 billion); and other expenses (-4.7 percent to KD 2.7 billion). As noted above, a large

part of the expenditure cut is due to the absence of one-off outlays from the previous year's budget, namely around KD 1 billion in arrears from unsettled subsidies related to the operation of refineries, water and power plants, while an additional KD 0.5 billion in mostly non-recurring accumulated leave allowance has also been spared. Stripping these items out, budgeted spending is down a more modest 1 percent from the previous year. Still, this seems to represent some degree of spending restraint in view of the large projected deficit, given that pre-COVID spending was growing at an average rate of around 6 percent per year.

In terms of the broader structure of spending, two points in the budget are worth highlighting: the continued dominance of wages and subsidies and the ongoing decline in capex. First, the share of wages and subsidies has steadily risen over the last few years and has now reached an elevated 79.4 percent of all estimated spending, with wages alone accounting for 60.4 percent, which is its highest share in recent years. While subsidy payments can be volatile due to changing energy prices, the rigidity of subsidy programs and overall wage spending means that significant savings are more likely to come from more dis-

cretionary items, i.e. the "allowances" and "bonuses" categories of employee compensation, which instead have witnessed a notable increase over recent years, or on capital expenditures.

Secondly, the targeted cut in capex is the third decline in a row, following cuts of 15-16 percent per year in FY22/23 and FY23/24. Moreover, actual capital spending has come in around 70-80 percent of the budget targets over the last few years, bringing government capex as a share of GDP down to a low of 3.7 percent in FY22/23. This is below regional peers and will need to be lifted if the government is to realize its project-intensive work-plan. We do note, though, that the government is putting greater stock in tapping the private sector, including through PPPs, and potentially off-balance sheet style investments through the proposed Ciyada fund, to help meet its expansive development plan.

On the other side, revenues are projected to decline to KD 18.7 billion (-4.1 percent y/y) including oil receipts of KD 16.2 billion (-5.4 percent b/b), with the authorities taking a customarily conservative view on oil prices (averaging \$70/bbl) and estimating lower b/o oil production (to 2.55 mb/d from 2.68 mb/d) in line with Kuwait's OPEC+ production cut ob-

ligations. That said, reaching the average production level forecast in the budget would only look likely if current output cuts of 135 kb/d through Q1 2024 (January 2024 production was at 2.4 mb/d) are quickly reversed, which, based on current estimates of oil market demand-supply balances, may be optimistic. Meanwhile, non-oil revenues are projected to increase to KD 2.4 billion (+5.7 percent), representing 13 percent of total revenues. While details have not yet been released, these include revenue from corporate taxes, customs duties, property rents, water and electric fees, income from hospitals, and other government fees and penalties. Growth in non-oil receipts penciled in for FY24/25 is close to its historic average, implying no introduction of fresh revenue measures in this budget.

### Limited impact on growth

In terms of the budget's impact on the economy, our initial take is that it looks broadly growth-neutral, with spending cut but from a very high base and with the key salaries segment (which would be influential in driving consumer spending) down least of all. Meanwhile, the projected trimming in capital spending is the smallest in three years - and could also be interpreted as

a more realistic target given the degree of underspending in previous years. Finally, we note that the draft budget is subject to revision, and spending has in the past often been pushed upwards before final approval.

Clearly, however, the underlying spending restraint in the draft budget reflects the need to address persistent fiscal deficits and the government's warning in its recent four-year work agenda update that the funding gap could, if unaddressed, spiral to KD 45-60 billion in aggregate over the next five years given the ballooning wage and subsidy bill and the overdependence on oil receipts. While control of spending is more straightforward and quicker in the near-term than introducing new revenue streams, the work plan also references moves to reprice fees for government services and property leases, reform subsidies and introduce corporate and excise taxes. Near-term liquidity pressures at the General Reserve Fund have eased due to the large fiscal surplus recorded in FY22/23 (due to exceptionally high oil prices) and transfers from the oil sector, but the government is also keen to avoid difficulties resurfacing through passage of the draft law on 'liquidity management tools', which would facilitate debt issuance.

## ECB to hold rates again, awaiting signs on inflation

**FRANKFURT:** The European Central Bank is expected to freeze interest rates again this week, with officials wary of starting to cut before they see more evidence that recent falls in inflation will be sustained. After the ECB launched an unprecedented campaign of monetary tightening to tame runaway consumer prices, eurozone inflation has been slowing steadily from a peak of over 10 percent in late 2022.

It eased to 2.6 percent in February, according to preliminary figure, down from 2.8 percent in January, and not far off the ECB's two-percent target. At the same time the outlook is bleak, with the eurozone narrowly dodging a technical recession in the second half of 2023, weighed down by a poor performance in its biggest economy, Germany.

While slowing inflation and a worsening economy should bolster arguments for rate cuts, inflation's downward path has been bumpy and officials remain worried about completing "the last mile" to the central bank's target. The Frankfurt-based ECB's governing council is widely expected to hold the benchmark deposit rate steady at a record four percent for a fourth straight meeting on Thursday. The ECB "is in no rush", Ann-Katrin Petersen from BlackRock Investment Institute told AFP.

"It still considers its inflation fight unfinished." Nevertheless, HSBC said that the "meeting will be closely watched by investors looking for any guidance on the timing of the first cut and the subsequent pace of easing". Investors will also be keeping an eye on the ECB's updated forecasts due to be released alongside the rate decision, with a slight downward revision expected for this year's GDP growth as well as inflation.

Inflation in the 20-nation eurozone surged in 2022 when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and energy costs soaring, with the situation compounded by pandemic-related supply chain woes. While the shocks triggered by the Ukraine war have eased, concerns have shifted to inflation in the service sector and wage growth, as workers push for bumper pay rises to combat higher prices.

"With many pay negotiations outstanding, the ECB might want to see more evidence that wages are moving in the right direction," said HSBC. Heightened geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have also added to worries that inflation could rebound. Yemeni rebels' attacks on Red Sea shipping have led to shipping companies avoiding the vital trade route, while a spillover of the Zionist-Hamas war could impact oil prices.

According to minutes of the governing council's last meeting in January, members stressed that "continuity, caution and patience were still needed, since the disinflationary process remained fragile and letting up too early could undo some of the progress made". But there is little doubt that when the ECB does move again, it will be to reduce borrowing costs. — AFP

## UK awaits voter-friendly budget before elections

**LONDON:** Britain's Conservative government unveils a pre-election budget on Wednesday that could feature voter-friendly measures as Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's party badly trails main opposition Labour in polls. Huge giveaways are not expected, however, as stubbornly-high inflation hikes repayments on state borrowing, undermining the ability to stimulate the recession-hit UK economy.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt, who unveils his budget before parliament, dampened hopes of major tax cuts in comments at the weekend. "It's going to be a prudent and responsible budget for long term growth," Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt told Sky News.

In an interview with the BBC, he said: "I think the most unconservative thing I could do would be to cut taxes by increasing borrowing. "Because that's just cutting taxes and saying that future generations have to pick the tax up."

Britain is expected to face a general election this year, though the exact timing is unclear, as Sunak looks to claw back ground from Labour leader Keir Starmer. The budget "could be the last fiscal set-piece before the next general election, and may end up defining the campaign", noted the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank. "Despite pressure to cut taxes, the outlook for the public finances remains weak," the IFS added. Kathleen Brooks, analyst at XTB trading group, said the fiscal headroom available to Hunt is about £20 billion (\$25 billion), lower than an average of almost £30 billion since the Tories came to power in 2010.

Tax cuts could impact public investment in key areas, such as the National Health Service, which is creaking under the strains of huge waiting lists and strikes by doctors seeking higher pay.

"If tax cuts are seen as being made in the face of crumbling public services that's a problem," Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary Uni-

## China's leadership 'confident' economy will improve

**BEIJING:** China's leadership is confident the economy will improve, an official said Monday, ahead of a key political meeting in which Beijing is expected to unveil one of its most pessimistic growth targets in years. Armed police and public security workers are ubiquitous on Beijing streets as thousands of delegates descend on the capital for the annual political conclave known as the "Two Sessions".

Front and centre at the meetings will be China's economy, which last year posted some of its lowest growth in decades and is battling a prolonged property sector crisis and soaring youth unemployment.

Tuesday's opening of the National People's Congress is expected to see Premier Li Qiang announce that growth in 2024 will stay largely flat, at around five percent.



LONDON: A handout picture released by the BBC shows Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt appearing on the BBC's 'Sunday Morning' political television show. — AFP

versity of London, told AFP.

While UK inflation is easing, notably on cooler energy bills, a current annual rate of four percent is still double the Bank of England's target. The central bank has lifted interest rates to 5.25 percent, a 15-year peak, to dampen inflation after it soared to the highest level in more than four decades in late 2022. Hiking borrowing costs has meanwhile worsened a cost-of-living crisis as commercial banks go on to increase their own interest rates on loans, including mortgages.

UK media reports suggest that the Tories could use the budget to steal a pledge by Labour, should it win the election, to scrap a loophole enabling

But at a Monday press conference, NPC spokesperson Lou Qinjian struck a bullish tone. China's leaders, he said, had "ample confidence" that the economy would rebound, adding the country has "more favourable conditions than challenges in its economic development".

"The underlying trend of a rebound in the economy and long-term growth remains unchanged." But in a break with decades-long tradition, he said Premier Li would not be holding a press conference at the end of the NPC meeting next Monday. Long a rare opportunity for international media to question China's top leaders directly—with usually pre-approved questions—Li had used last year's briefing to warn that Beijing's modest growth goals would be "no easy task".

And in 2020, his late predecessor Li Keqiang admitted that 600 million people in China were still living on just 1,000 yuan (\$139) a month—a break from China's official claims to have defeated poverty. There was also no mention of a press conference with the foreign minister—currently Wang Yi—which normally takes place a few days into the NPC meeting.

Lou on Monday also addressed China's hope for

Britain's wealthiest residents to reduce their tax bill.

Non-dom status refers to people living in Britain whose permanent domicile is abroad, allowing them to avoid UK tax on income earned outside the country. "As for stealing some of Labour's clothes by supposedly hitting the wealthy, that will cause Labour some problem since they've made spending promises on that front," noted Bale. He said the Conservatives need not "worry about donors deserting them". "Most ultra-high net worth individuals funding the Conservatives are far more worried about a Labour government than they are about paying Jeremy Hunt a little more money in tax." — AFP



NANTONG, China: Employees work on a production line at a workshop for Celxpert Energy Corporation, which makes lithium batteries for laptops and other uses, in Nantong in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

this year's presidential election in the United States, with which it has clashed in recent years on flash-point issues from technology and trade to human rights. Americans go to the polls this November in an election that will likely pit former leader Donald Trump against President Joe Biden. — AFP



Lifestyle



Artists performing a choreography dance reflecting the ongoing conflict in Gaza. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Narratives of resilience: Highlights from 'THE RETURN' festival



By Passant Hisham

With a firm belief in the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland, the second edition of the "The Return" festival was held at Loyac Academy on Sunday. Through a compelling monodrama and an expressive choreography performance, artists portrayed the ongoing suffering and resilience of Palestinians, reminding people to keep supporting the cause.

In her theatrical piece, "The Gazelle of Akka", Palestinian actor and writer Raeda Taha narrated chapters of Ghassan Kanafani's life, honoring his legacy as a prolific author and activist whose life was tragically cut short by his brutal assassination at the age of 36.

In her conversation with Kuwait Times, she noted that despite Kanafani's death, his works continue to have a significant influence on people today. "The world must understand that Zionists not only target armed resistors but also those who hold pens, as sometimes the influence of words surpasses that of



weapons," Taha noted.

She emphasized that as a writer, critic, activist, sculptor and painter, Kanafani's multifaceted personality vividly symbolizes the true Palestinian identity. "Ghassan serves as evidence that Palestinians are not merely resistance figures waiting to die at any moment, but they can also be talented artists," she remarked. Speaking of death, Taha em-

phatically highlighted her people's rejection of the concept. "We don't believe in death, because we only die for the sake of life," she affirmed.

The show also depicted the unique bond between Taha and Kanafani, who was a friend of her father's, and emphasized the remarkable parallels in their lives and deaths. Both were driven by a singular cause, competing to make

the ultimate sacrifice for reclaiming their land, until they tragically fell victim to Zionist violence.

She remarked on inheriting from them their admiration for life, as both lived it to the fullest. "My dad and Ghassan never stopped laughing, whether at life itself, with their endless jokes about it, or in celebration of its moments," she recalled. This trait was evident in Taha's portrayal of Kanafani's life in her show, which encompassed everything he cherished, from the arts and music to his inspiring literary works. She vividly mimicked his manner of speech and expression, bringing his memory to life.

As the rest of the event unfolded, the choreography performance led by Tina Zuboic, head of Loyac's dance department, depicted glimpses from the current horrific situation in Gaza. In a sentimental manner, she expressed her heartfelt solidarity with Palestine through movements and a blend of contemporary and traditional songs about Palestine.



Actor and writer Raeda Taha performing her monodrama on stage.

## Singapore says Taylor Swift gig grant not as high as speculated

Singapore said Monday its grant to Taylor Swift for her concerts in the city was nowhere near as high as speculated, following media reports that the superstar was offered millions of dollars per gig. Around 300,000 people from Singapore and around the region are expected to at-

tend the six sold-out shows that began March 2 -- but some neighbours were not happy about being left off The Eras Tour. Some, including reportedly the Thai prime minister, have said that Swift was paid millions to keep her from performing anywhere else in the region.

"There has been some online speculation as to the size of the grant. I can say that it is not accurate and not anywhere as high as speculated," Singapore's culture minister Edwin Tong told parliament. "Due to business confidentiality reasons, we cannot reveal the specific size of the grant or the conditions of the grant." Tong added that the "economic benefits to Singapore are assessed to be significant and outweigh the size of the grant".

Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin had reportedly said, citing a concert promoter, that Singapore offered Swift up to US\$3 million per concert if she did not play anywhere else in Southeast Asia. A lawmaker in the Philippines also criticized Singapore, reportedly saying this was not "what good neighbors do".



Fans of US singer Taylor Swift, also known as a Swifties, display friendship bracelets as they arrive for the first of the pop star's six sold-out Eras Tour concerts at the National Stadium in Singapore.

Tong played down the role the grant may have played in convincing Swift to perform only in Singapore. "Promoters of top artists will do their own calculation and assess where they want to perform and for how long," he said, citing Singapore's location and infra-

structure as key factors. Since the end of pandemic curbs, a number of top artists have performed in Singapore, including Ed Sheeran, Coldplay, Blackpink and Harry Styles. —AFP



Fans of US singer Taylor Swift, also known as a Swifties, take photos as they arrive for the first of the pop star's six sold-out Eras Tour concerts at the National Stadium in Singapore.



US singer Taylor Swift performs on stage during a concert as part of her Eras World Tour in Sydney. —AFP photos



Fans of US singer Taylor Swift, also known as a Swifties, walk around an installation in the "Eras Tour Trail" that depicts different eras of the pop star's career at the Marina Bay Sands complex in Singapore.

## 'Dune: Part Two' spices up N America box office with big opening

Bringing spice to a so-far lean movie year, Warner Bros.' new sci-fi film "Dune: Part Two" shot to the top of the North American box office this weekend, taking in an estimated \$81.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. "This is an outstanding opening" for a sci-fi sequel, said analyst David A. Gross, adding that a sprawling international cast including Anya Taylor-Joy, Timothee Chalamet, Zendaya, Austin Butler, Florence Pugh, Rebecca Ferguson, Jason Momoa, Josh Brolin, Lea Seydoux and Javier Bardem had provided an added boost.

Denis Villeneuve's epic sequel to the original "Dune" -- based on Frank Herbert's 1965 novel about war and survival on the deeply inhospitable desert planet of Arrakis -- saw the young year's largest opening, roughly doubling the original film's opening. "Dune: Part Two" has taken in an additional \$97 million abroad. Its strong opening left the box office leader of the past two weekends, Paramount's "Bob Marley: One Love," in the dust -- or sand -- as the biopic took in just \$7.4 million for second place. British actor Kingsley Ben-Adir stars as the iconic reggae singer.

In third were the latest episodes of Fathom Events and Angel Studios' faith-based "The Chosen," on the life of Jesus Christ, at \$3.9 million. Egyptian-born Jonathan Roumie plays Jesus in the crowdfunded series. Fourth spot went to Lionsgate's true-life drama "Ordinary Angels," at \$3.8 million. Hilary Swank stars as a Kentucky hairdresser who rallies her town to help a widower with a gravely ill daughter.

Sony's "Madame Web," a "Spider-Man" spinoff starring Dakota Johnson, placed fifth for the weekend at \$3.2 million.

**Rounding out the top 10 were:**  
"Migration" (\$2.5 million)  
"Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba" (\$2.1 million)  
"Wonka" (\$1.7 million)  
"Argylle" (\$1.4 million)  
"The Beekeeper" (\$1.1 million) —AFP



## Sports

# 'We got that wrong': NZ coach admits first Test mistakes

## Injured N Zealand seamer O'Rourke out of second Australia Test

WELLINGTON: New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said Monday he had misjudged the first Test wicket and regretted leaving out spinner Mitchell Santner after his side's heavy defeat to Australia. New Zealand were thumped by 172 runs at Basin Reserve in Wellington after winning the toss and asking Australia to bat on a green wicket that produced bounce and spin.

Off-spinner Nathan Lyon took 10 wickets in the match while New Zealand had to rely on part-time slow bowlers Rachin Ravindra and Glenn Phillips, who took six between them. "If we knew it was going to bounce, then Santner would have played, so yeah we got that wrong," Stead told reporters in Wellington.

"It was a tricky wicket. It spun and bounced a lot more than what we were expecting," he said of New Zealand's decision to go in with four seamers. "I put our hand up to that. It's not what we have seen from the Basin Reserve in the past either. That played into Nathan Lyon's hands."

Stead said Santner could be recalled for the second and final Test depending on the wicket in Christchurch. "He's the guy we have trust in. He is certainly an option," Stead added. Uncapped pace bowler Ben Sears has been called up to replace Will O'Rourke, who has been ruled out with a hamstring injury.

New Zealand are chasing a first Test win over Australia since 2011. "That is what we are here for. There is still a lot of belief in the team," Stead said. "I thought the way we competed in the second innings was strong, we put Australia under pressure

at different times. "We will go to Christchurch believing we can win."

Meanwhile, Black Caps seamer Will O'Rourke will miss the second Test against Australia in Christchurch this week with a hamstring strain, New Zealand Cricket said Monday. Uncapped pace-bowler Ben Sears has been called up in his place for the second and final home game against Australia, starting Friday at Hagley Park.

The touring Australians lead the series 1-0 after their 172-run victory in the first Test, which finished on Sunday in Wellington. New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said 26-year-old Sears, who has taken 58 first-class wickets in 19 appearances for Wellington, was ready for Test cricket.

"Ben's a young bowler with a quality skill set," Stead added. "He bowls with genuine pace and gets good bounce which is always a great asset in red ball cricket." O'Rourke, 22, injured his left hamstring while bowling on Saturday. He requires at least two weeks' rehabilitation, New Zealand Cricket said.

He impressed on his Test debut last month by taking nine wickets in a home win against South Africa. "It's disappointing for Will to be ruled out, especially after making such a strong start to his international career," Stead said.

Veteran Neil Wagner, who announced his retirement last week after not being selected for the first Test, has been released from the squad ahead of the team reassembling in Christchurch on Tuesday. New Zealand are chasing their first win over Australia since 2011.

Black Caps opener Devon Conway will undergo



WELLINGTON: New Zealand communications manager Willy Nicholls (L) and player Neil Wagner arrive at the Basin on day three of the 1st International cricket Test match between New Zealand and Australia at the Basin Reserve in Wellington. — AFP

surgery this week for the thumb injury he suffered during last month's 3-0 Twenty20 series defeat to Australia. He is expected to be out for at least eight

weeks, New Zealand Cricket said. The T20 World Cup, hosted by the United States and the West Indies, starts in June. — AFP

## News in Brief

## Berardi to miss Euro 2024

ROME: Italy forward Domenico Berardi has been ruled out of Euro 2024 after suffering a season-ending Achilles injury during Sassuolo's 1-0 defeat by Verona in Serie A on Sunday. Sassuolo said in a statement on Monday that tests had revealed a "complete rupture of the Achilles tendon" in Berardi's right leg. The 29-year-old will undergo surgery on Tuesday, his club added, without specifying how long he will be sidelined. Berardi, who has scored eight goals in 28 matches for Italy, was making his first appearance for Sassuolo after nearly two months out injured against Verona. Italy have been drawn with Spain, Croatia and Albania in Group B at Euro 2024, which runs from June 14-July 14 in Germany. — AFP

## Barca lose De Jong, Pedri

BARCELONA: Barcelona midfielders Pedri and Frenkie de Jong are expected to miss the Champions League clash against Napoli after the Spanish club confirmed Monday injuries picked up in Liga action at the weekend. Dutch international De Jong suffered a right ankle sprain with Spaniard Pedri picking up a new injury to his right hamstring in Sunday's goalless draw at Athletic Bilbao. Barca did not specify the duration of the pair's absence, but they could be out for more than a month and miss the Champions League last 16 second leg clash against Napoli next week. The five-time European champions will host the current Italian champions on March 12 with the tie finely poised after a 1-1 draw in the first leg. De Jong was sidelined earlier this season with a right ankle injury, while Pedri has been plagued by right thigh problems with the latest being his third of the campaign. Pedri is also expected to miss Spain's international friendlies against Colombia in London on March 22 and Brazil at Santiago Bernabeu four days later. — AFP

## Ex-FA bosses on trial

FRANKFURT: Three German ex-top football officials went on trial on Monday in a 13.7-million-euro (\$14.8 million) tax evasion case linked to the 2006 World Cup. Former German Football Association (DFB) presidents Wolfgang Niersbach and Theo Zwanziger, as well as former general secretary Horst Schmidt, are accused of submitting false tax returns in connection with the tournament. Germany's successful hosting of the 2006 World Cup, often referred to as "Das Sommermaerchen" or Summer Fairytale, subsequently became a nightmare for organizers after accusations emerged years later of financial wrongdoing. In the latest case, being heard at the Frankfurt Regional Court, prosecutors allege the three men evaded paying 13.7 million euros in a variety of different taxes in 2006. According to the indictment, a major part of the case revolves around the organizing committee receiving around 6.7 million euros in 2005, which the DFB claimed in its annual accounts as operating expenses for a World Cup gala. But the gala never happened, with the money instead used for other purposes, meaning the payment should not have been recognized as tax deductible, it said. — AFP

## French blank Britain to capture LA Sevens rugby title

LOS ANGELES: France beat Great Britain 21-0 in Sunday's championship match to capture the World Rugby SVNS Series title at Los Angeles, completing a stellar debut for Antoine Dupont. Antoine Zeghdar's try and a conversion by Stephen Parez-Edo Martin in the seventh minute lifted France ahead 7-0 at half-time.

Martin converted his own try in the ninth minute for a 14-0 French lead and Theo Fornier added a try in the 13th minute and converted to seal France's championship. The crown marked a triumphant debut in the format for former World Rugby Player of the Year Dupont, France's 15-a-side captain and scrum-half.

Dupont switched to sevens in a bid to compete for Paris Olympic gold later this year. He debuted last weekend when France finished third at Vancouver and helped deliver the squad's first title of the season. In the earlier semi-finals, France held off Ireland 26-24 while Great Britain edged Spain 10-7.

France advanced when Ireland's Billy Dardis missed a conversion kick after Terry Kennedy scored his second try in the 15th minute. Rayan Rebbadj delivered a try and three conversions for France, which also had tries from Zeghdar, Dupont and Paulin Riva.

The French had seized a 26-12 lead before Zac Ward and Kennedy struck in the final minutes to lift



CARSON: Great Britain's Olufemi Sofolarin (R) tries to intercept the ball as France's Rayan Rebbadj catches it during the 2024 HSBC Rugby Sevens Los Angeles tournament final men's match between France and Great Britain at Dignity Health Sports Park in Carson, California. — AFP

the Irish within reach. In the other semi-final, Robbie Fergusson's try in the fifth minute gave Great Britain a 5-0 half-time lead and Alex Davis added another in the ninth minute that made the difference.

Tobias Sainz-Trapaga scored a try for the Spaniards in the 12th minute and Juan Ramos added a

conversion but it was too little and too late. In the women's final, Michaela Blyde scored three tries to power second-place New Zealand over series leader Australia 29-14. In the semi-finals, the Aussies ousted the United States 26-19 and the Kiwis eliminated Canada 31-12. — AFP

## Brignone flies all through the fog to claim 25th WCup win

KVITFJELL: Federica Brignone burst through the fog to win the second super-G in Kvitfjell on Sunday ahead of Lara Gut-Behrami, who picked up precious points in the race for the big globe. Despite skiing when visibility was at its worst Brignone beat the overall leader by 0.61 seconds with the Czech Ester Ledecka rounding out the podium 0.79sec behind the winner.

It marked a 25th World Cup win for the 33-year-old Italian, her fourth this season. "For sure it's a weird race, it was a hard day for all the girls," said Brignone after an event which was constantly halted because of the fog and took two and a half hours for the first 30 skiers to compete, making the race official.

"I'm usually good when the start is moved or where there is some waiting and when there is no visibility," said Brignone. "I was not seeing really good but I had everything in my mind

and I was just focusing on my skiing and what I had to do."

After finishing sixth the day before in the first super-G, which was initially intended to be a downhill, the Italian has skied herself back into contention for one of the big prizes. She is now second in the race for the big globe, 326 points behind Gut-Behrami and lies third in the discipline standings, 74 points behind the Swiss and five points behind the Austrian Cornelia Huetter.

The real winner of the weekend, though, was Gut-Behrami, who won the first super-G on Saturday and looks odds-on to claim her second crystal globe. "I'm happy about the way I skied," she said. "Also in these conditions where it's soft, I'm not usually the best skier in those conditions."

Not only does Gut-Behrami hold a sizeable lead over Brignone but she is 385-points ahead of Mikaela Shiffrin who is expected to return from injury



KVITFJELL: Winner Italy's Federica Brignone (C), third placed Czech Republic's Ester Ledecka (R) and second placed Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami celebrate on the podium after the women's Super G event of the FIS Alpine World Cup in Elkville, Norway. — AFP

next week in Are (Sweden), where a giant and a slalom are scheduled, before the finals from in Saalbach, Austria from March 16 to 23.

There was disappointment, however, for local favourite Ragnhild Mowinckel, who announced earlier in the

week that she would retire at the end of the season. The 31-year-old Norwegian was hoping for a good show in her final outing on home snow but the double Olympic medallist and four-time World Cup winner could only finish 10th. — AFP

## Eckroat leads, van Rooyen in hunt at Cognizant Classic

MIAMI: Austin Eckroat was clinging to a one-shot lead when darkness halted play on Sunday at the US PGA Tour's Cognizant Classic, which was headed for a Monday finish after thunderstorms stopped play for three and a half hours.

Overnight co-leader Eckroat had back-to-back birdies at the fourth and fifth and was 15-under for the tournament through seven holes when darkness fell. He and overnight co-leaders Shane Lowry of Ireland and David Skins of England didn't tee off until after the lengthy thunderstorm delay.

Eckroat called it "just a weird day." "Mother Nature, there's nothing you can do about it," Eckroat said. "I almost didn't think we were going to play at all today, so I kind of shut off for a little bit and then I had to get back into competitive mode." Lowry, the 2019 Open Champion, slipped down the leaderboard with a bogey at the fifth shortly before darkness halted play. Skins, chasing a first title at 42, had bogeys at the first and third.

South African Erik van Rooyen made a big charge before the storms struck, opening with birdies at his first six holes on the way to an eight-under par 63 that put him in the clubhouse on 14-under 270. American Jake Knapp was 13-under with three to play and Keith Mitchell was in the clubhouse at 12-under after a final-round 65.

Van Rooyen was delighted to turn things around on Sunday after a third round that left him feeling "slightly crabby" over the shots he thought he left on the course. "Feeley, my caddy, tells me 'Bro, you don't know what's going to

happen, you might birdie the first seven tomorrow," and we almost did that!" van Rooyen said.

Van Rooyen's longest birdie putt from his opening six was a 13-footer at the third. He added birdies at eight and 10 before play was halted, his first miscue coming after play resumed when he was unable to get up and down from a greenside bunker at the par-three 15th.

He rolled in a 30-footer to birdie 17, but had to scramble to save par at the par-five 18th after his second shot found a cart path left of the bunkers guarding the left of the green. "It's hard," he said of coming back from the delay. "The greens were so much slower coming back. There's so many little adjustments you need to make."

"That shot I just hit on 18 from the left of the green there was so wet. "But I want to call myself a pro golfer, I need to be able to adapt to that. I'm really pleased with today's round. "If I don't end up winning this tournament, I certainly don't think it's because of the rain delay today." — AFP



Sports

# Raspadori fires Napoli past Juve as Bologna's dream continues

## Napoli are eight points away from the fourth position held by Bologna

MILAN: Giacomo Raspadori struck late to give Napoli a 2-1 win over unfortunate Juventus on Sunday, while Bologna's Champions League dream continues after beating top-four rivals Atalanta. Italy attacker Raspadori rammed home the winner on the rebound in the 88th minute after Wojciech Szczesny saved Victor Osimhen's penalty, as Napoli showed glimpses that a dreadful season as Italian champions might be turning in the right direction.

Napoli looked like having to accept a draw from their lively display in the 81st minute when Federico Chiesa cancelled out Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's volleyed opener with a rifled finish of his own. Instead Francesco Calzona's team moved up to seventh, three points behind sixth-placed Atalanta who sit in the Europa Conference League spot following their loss earlier on Sunday.

Champions League football is still a big ask as Napoli are eight points away from the fourth position held by Bologna, but there has been a clear improvement under Calzona, who replaced Walter Mazzarri last month. Renewed confidence at Napoli and, in particular, of star forward Kvaratskhelia also bodes well for the trip to Barcelona later in March when a spot in the Champions League quarter-finals will be up for grabs.

Juventus, who were without a host of players including injured key midfielders Adrien Rabiot and Weston McKennie, have given Inter Milan another chance to extend their massive league lead against Genoa on Monday night. Massimiliano Allegri's Juve trail champions-elect Inter by 12 points and second place is far from secure with AC Milan breathing down their necks, just a single point back in third.

Defeat was harsh for Juve who not only fought

back from going a goal down but had a host of chances. Dusan Vlahovic hitting the post and then wasting another great opportunity on the stroke of half-time with his team trailing.

"The boys played well today, in the first half we had good chances and you have to take them...above all in these big matches," said Allegri to DAZN. "You have to do better in those situations, it's part of maturing as a player."

### Bologna dreaming

Bologna's Joshua Zirkzee celebrated his first Netherlands call-up by levelling Ademola Lookman's first-half opener with a penalty in the 57th minute, before Lewis Ferguson ensured a 2-1 win with his beautiful volley four minutes later.

A sixth straight win put daylight between Thiago Motta's Bologna and the rest of Italy's bidders for next season's revamped version of Europe's top club competition. Surprising Bologna are four points ahead of fellow in-form outfit Roma who are fifth following their 4-1 thumping of Monza on Saturday.

"I looked up at the ball as it came past Joshua and the only thing I thought was 'shoot'," said Ferguson to DAZN of his fine winner. Bologna are seven-time Italian champions, but they haven't won the Scudetto since 1964. Their last league title led to a short-lived campaign in the old European Cup, where they were knocked out at the first attempt by Anderlecht on a coin toss following a 2-2 aggregate draw. "I'm not thinking about it at all, I'm just thinking about our performances," insisted Motta when asked about Champions League qualification.

Domenico Berardi is at risk of missing Euro 2024 with Italy after suffering an Achilles tendon injury



NAPLES: Napoli's defender from Kosovo #13 Amir Rrahmani (L) tackles Juventus' Serbian forward #9 Dusan Vlahovic during the Italian Serie A football match SSC Napoli vs FC Juventus at the Diego-Armando-Maradona stadium in Naples. - AFP

during Sassuolo's 1-0 defeat at relegation rivals Verona. Karol Swiderski ensured that Verona stayed one place above the relegation zone with the only goal against 19th-placed Sassuolo, who lost their first match under Davide Ballardini and are set to be without star man Berardi for the rest of the season.

Calcgiari are just inside the bottom three but level on 23 points with Verona after Jakub Jankto netted the decisive strike in a 1-0 win at Empoli. Empoli are only two points above the drop zone in 14th in a crowded battle against relegation, level with Lecce who drew 1-1 at fellow strugglers Frosinone. - AFP

## USA, Mexico into Women's Gold Cup semis with wins

LOS ANGELES: The United States eased into the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup with a 3-0 victory over Colombia on Sunday while Mexico joined them in the last four thanks to a 3-2 win over Paraguay. The USA will play for a place in the final against Canada on Wednesday while Mexico will face Brazil with both games and Sunday's final in San Diego.

A Lindsey Horan penalty and first-half goals from Jenna Nighswonger and Jaedyn Shaw gave the USA a 3-0 lead at half-time as they bounced back from a surprise loss to Mexico in their final group game on Monday. Any hangover from that loss was cured when Alex Morgan was barged over in the box by Jorelyn Carabali and Horan calmly slotted home from the spot to put the USA ahead in the 13th minute.

Nine minutes later and the Americans doubled their lead when the overlapping Nighswonger fired home a sweet left-foot shot after a header down from Morgan. Colombia responded positively, though, and the USA had goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher, making her 100th appearance for the team, to thank for two fine saves.

First she dove to keep out a powerful strike from Linda Caicedo and then the keeper was at full-stretch to get her left hand to a curling effort from Ilana Izquierdo. But the game was put beyond Colombia in first-half stoppage time when Trinity Rodman slid a low ball across the box that was turned in by 19-year-old Shaw.

Horan struck the post with a free kick just before the break but the second half was kept under control well by interim coach Twila Kilgore's team. The semi-final provides a chance for the USA to avenge their loss to Canada in the semi-finals of the Tokyo Olympics. "Most of all it was about the intensity we showed through the 90 minutes," said Naeher.

"Obviously we were disappointed in the result against Mexico and I am really proud of the way we regrouped in a short period of time and came out and the three quick goals nice and early set the tone for us. It wasn't easy. Colombia are a great team." Mexico overcame a determined Paraguay thanks to an outstanding display from Lizbeth Ovalle, who scored twice to take her tally for the tournament to five goals.

Mexico went into the game on a high after beating the USA—only the second-ever victory over their rivals, whom they could meet again in the final. Ovalle fired Mexico in front in the 31st minute after she was found at the back post by Mayra Pelayo and drilled home a low left-foot shot.—AFP

## Girona and Barca fail to exploit Real's Liga slip

MADRID: Presented with a chance to gain ground on Liga leaders Real Madrid, both Girona and then Barcelona tamely surrendered points on Sunday. After Real Madrid drew in Valencia the night before, surprising title challengers Girona had a chance to reverse their recent slump and regain some ground.

But they continued to subsides as they lost 1-0 at Mallorca. That gave giant Catalan rivals Barcelona a chance to take second, but they drew 0-0 in Bilbao in the late game. Girona remained second, seven points behind Real with Barcelona another point behind.

Atletico Madrid tightened their grip on fourth as they beat Betis 2-1. On Saturday, Real Madrid drew 2-2 at Valencia in a game that ended in controversy as Jude Bellingham, who thought he had just scored the winner, was sent off for protesting after his strike was ruled out because the referee had blown the final whistle.

In Palma on Sunday, Mallorca, fresh from reaching the Copa del Rey final, scored the only goal after 33 minutes. Following a corner, the ball rebounded off Mallorca's Cyle Larin and fell to Jose-Manuel Copete in space less than 10 metres out. The defender smashed a shot in off the underside of the bar.

Girona enjoyed a slight edge in possession but

struggled to create clear-cut chances as they failed to score for the third time in five games. "I am disappointed with the result but not with the team's attitude," said Girona coach Michel Sanchez.

The victory pulled Mallorca up to 15th, eight points clear of the relegation places. Barcelona ended their visit to Bilbao playing out an uneventful goalless draw at walking pace. "We didn't play a good game, we didn't attack well," said coach Xavi. "We didn't play our best. The match required more from us. It's a missed opportunity. The team could have done more." Barcelona also suffered potentially costly injuries to Frenkie de Jong and Pedri, who went off in tears. Bilbao, who also reached the Spanish Cup final in midweek, stayed fifth, five points behind Atletico Madrid, the only team that stated the weekend in the top half of the table to win.

In the afternoon, Atletico took the lead against Betis after eight minutes with help from the visitors. Memphis Depay drove a cross toward Alvaro Morata, lurking at the far post, but the ball never reached the Spain striker as three Betis players combined to put the ball into their own net.

Hector Bellerin scuffed the ball onto team-mate German Pezzella who deflected it toward the line where goalkeeper Rui Silva could only parry it into his own goal. Rui Silva brought down Morata to concede a 27th minute penalty but the goalkeeper saved the spot kick and two follow-up attempts by Morata. Morata found the target in the 43rd minute, nodding in a rebound from close range after Rui Silva saved a shot by Rodrigo de Paul. "It was a deserved victory," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone. "We needed it."—AFP

## Bayern's Lazio clash offers outgoing Tuchel lifeline

BERLIN: Bayern Munich's home clash with Lazio in the Champions League on Tuesday offers coach Thomas Tuchel a chance to help salvage his reputation as he makes his way out of the club. Mired in mid-table in Serie A, Lazio—who had three players sent off in Friday's loss to Milan—are also under pressure, but take a 1-0 first-leg lead in the last 16 tie to the Allianz Arena.

Hired two-thirds of the way through last season after Bayern surprisingly fired Julian Nagelsmann, Tuchel is on his way out, having struggled to keep Bayern on track for the Bundesliga title with Leverkusen comfortably in pole position.

Two early German Cup exits, and elimination at the hands of eventual champions Manchester City in Europe last season, means that Tuchel's only trophy was last year's Bundesliga, somewhat gifted on goal difference by Borussia Dortmund's final-day collapse.

Nagelsmann lost just 10 of 84 games in charge of Bayern. With largely the same squad, plus England captain Harry Kane and South Korea defender Kim Min-jae, Tuchel has already lost 11 of his 45 matches.

### 'Buzz in the air'

Friday's 2-2 draw with Freiburg and Leverkusen's 2-0 win at Cologne on Sunday mean Bayern are 10 points behind with 10 league games remaining in the Bundesliga title chase. Despite Tuchel's side winning just one of their past five games, the Bayern hierarchy promised the coach will see out the season.

German media however have claimed the only thing keeping Tuchel in a job is the lack of a reasonable interim alternative. All of Bayern's assistant coaches came to the club with Tuchel. The club is reluctant to appoint a permanent coach, with sights firmly set on a move for Leverkusen's Xabi Alonso in the summer.

After Friday's game, Tuchel said his side were not lacking "desire" but rather "discipline", saying "we played completely without structure" while criticising his team's "body language". "We did things we've never trained, that we've never even spoken about. From the beginning, we played like it was the 85th minute and we were a goal down."

Inconsistency is not a new theme at Bayern, with the club leaning heavily on Kane's 27 league goals to bail them out. Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller, a two-time Champions League winner, said Sunday: "The excitement is palpable for everyone, whether fans or players. There's a buzz in the air." Tuchel on the other hand seemed unsure of what to expect ahead of Lazio's visit. "The ups and downs have been with us for a long time," he said. After the decision to part ways was made in late February, Tuchel said both he and the club could move forward with "clarity". The coach also said he could be more "ruthless" in his decision making, perhaps best exemplified by moving Joshua Kimmich to his unfavoured right-back position.—AFP



BILBAO: Barcelona's Spanish forward #27 Lamine Yamal (FRONT) and Athletic Bilbao's Spanish forward #07 Alejandro Berenguer vie for the ball during the Spanish league football match between Athletic Club Bilbao and FC Barcelona at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao. - AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics & Hospitals

#### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

#### Industrial Shuwaikh

Qadsiya	24814764
Dasmah	22515088
Bneid Al-Gar	22532265
Shaab	22531908
Qibla	22518752
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22459381
Mirqab	22451082
Sharq	22456536
Salmiya	22465401
	25746401

#### Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

### Change of Name

I, Nubla Fasil holder of Indian Passport No. N0419170 having permanent address Thaikandy House, Vellimadukunnu, Post Marikunnu, Kozhikode, Kerala, India, Pin Code: 673012, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as : Given name: Nubla and Surname: Kummancheery.

(#5170 5/3/2024)

I, Siddesh Fatarpekar Holder of Indian Passport No. V9396775 Having my permanent Address H. No. 417. Voilem Bhat Mercedes Murda Tiswadi Goa Pin 403005. State Goa, Country India. Residing in Kuwait a present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name Siddesh and Surname Pereira.

(#5171 5/3/2024)





GLASGOW: Belgium's Yania Ndjip-Nyemeck (L) falls next to Spain's Xenia Benach (C) and Bahamas' Devynne Charlton during the Women's 60m hurdles heats during the Indoor World Athletics Championships in Glasgow, Scotland. — AFP

## Charlton shines, Mondo Duplantis reigns supreme at world indoor championships

### Switzerland's Ehammer edges Norway's Skotheim by just 11 points for gold

GLASGOW: Devynne Charlton bettered her own 60m hurdles world record, Mondo Duplantis once again ruled supreme in the pole vault and there were second golds for Femke Bol and Alexander Doom on the third and final day of the world indoor championships on Sunday.

In another scintillating night of track and field at Glasgow's Emirates Arena, US sprint star Noah Lyles also played a cameo, running the third leg of the US men's 4x400m relay ultimately thwarted in their bid for gold by Doom's Belgium.

Charlton credited a mental reset as she stole the show with a blistering 7.65 seconds to win the hurdles. "This means a whole lot because I have set myself goals," said the Bahamian, who improved by three-hundredths the previous best she set at last month's Millrose Games in New York.

Also showing mental application was Duplantis, who had two nery failures at 5.85m before overcoming his demons for a dominant win with a best of 6.05 metres. The US-born Swede went close in three efforts at what would have been 1cm beyond his own world record of 6.23m, but it was not to be. "I had my back against the wall quite a few times today," Duplantis said. "I try not to overthink it and learn from the mistake I made on the first two and put it all together. I was able to pull it out of the bag today."

While Duplantis will be one of the main pin-ups for this summer's Paris Olympics, there is no doubt that joining him will be Bol. The two-time world 400m hurdles champion bettered her own indoor 400m record when winning gold on Saturday and again provided a crucial anchor run to steer the Dutch team to gold

in the 4x400m relay. "I feel so tired, but the championships are like this," said Bol. "These girls give me so much energy to run and especially if they give me the baton (when we're) in first place. It is such a great team, you cannot let them down."

#### Perfect position

There was also a second gold for the unlikely figure of relative unknown Doom. The Belgian produced a stunning anchor leg to scupper Lyles' bid for an elusive gold after the American was pushed into silver by teammate Christian Coleman in the 60m on Friday.

Doom, who outsprung Norway's Karsten Warholm for the 400m crown on Saturday, produced a last-gasp push for the line as Belgium trumped the Americans by six-hundredths. "The guys put me in the perfect position," said Doom. "I knew

there was something possible at the end."

Lyles, who is targeting an Olympic sprint treble, said he felt "like I got the job done... I'm very positive about Paris." In a high-octane session of back-to-back track action, American Bryce Hoppel pulled out the stops to snatch gold in the men's 800m in 1:44.92 from Sweden's Andreas Kramer, with Belgium's Elliott Crestan taking bronze. Gemma Reekie's hopes of women's 800m glory on her home track were dashed but the Scot still came away with a silver behind Ethiopian winner Tsigie Duguma (2:01.90). Benin's Noelle Yario rounded out the podium.

New Zealander Geordie Beamish then barrelled down the outside of the home straight to pass four athletes for an exceptional gold in the men's 1500m, in a personal best of 3:36.54. Americans Cole Hocker and Hobbs Kessler claimed the lesser med-

als in that event, as did Nikki Hiltz and Emily Mackay in the women's 1500m won by Ethiopian Freweyni Hailu in 4:01.46.

Switzerland's Simon Ehammer edged Norway's Sander Skotheim by just 11 points for gold in the men's heptathlon. Ehammer timed 6.73sec in the 60m, managed bests of 8.03m, 14.39 and 1.95 in the long jump, shot put and high jump, before clocking 7.62sec in the 60m hurdles, clearing 5.20m in the pole vault and timing 2:46.03 for the 1000m.

That gave him 6,418 points to Skotheim's 6,407, Estonia's Johannes Erm rounding out the podium (6,340). In the absence of all-conquering Venezuelan and defending champion Yulimar Rojas, American Tara Davis-Woodhall took long jump gold with a best of 7.07m ahead of teammate Monae' Nichols (6.85m) and Spain's Fatima Diame (6.78). — AFP

### Kuwait qualifies for Gulf Handball Championship final



DOHA: Kuwait (Sporting Cub) handball team qualified to play in the Gulf Handball Clubs Championship final in its 40th edition. This year's championship was hosted by Qatar's Al-Arabi club and is set to continue until March 5. Kuwait club played Al-Arabi in the semifinal and man-

aged to defeat them (39-36) in extra time to qualify for the final where they will face Qatar's Al-Rayan club next Tuesday. The championship started with eight teams from Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, and Oman split into two groups. The reigning champions are Kuwait club.—KUNA

### Celtics overwhelm Warriors, Clippers edge T-Wolves

WASHINGTON: Overall leader Boston delivered a devastating and historic performance in routing the Golden State Warriors 140-88 on Sunday, stretching the Celtics' win streak to 11 games. It was the third-largest blowout victory in Celtics history, a legacy dating to 1946.

Boston's Jaylen Brown scored 25 of his 29 points in a record-shattering first half while Jayson Tatum celebrated his 26th birthday by scoring 22 of his 27 points during the first two quarters of domination. "It's up there. Great birthday. Got to do what I love in front of the best fans in the world and get a win," Tatum said.

The Celtics became the first club in NBA history to win three games in the same season by 50 or more points. The Celtics routed Indiana 155-104 in November and last month blasted Brooklyn 136-86, taking both in Boston.

Despite Latvian big man Kristaps Porzingis being sidelined by a left quad bruise, the host Celtics seized an 82-38 lead after the second quarter, and closed the period on a 23-1 run over six minutes to seize command at 44-22.

The Warriors shot 34.9 percent (15-of-43) in the first half, 3-of-18 from 3-point range, and made eight turnovers while the Celtics shot 60 percent (30-of-50) in the first half, 15-of-24 from beyond the arc, and made only one turnover.

Top players saw little of the court in the second half. Boston stretched the lead to 115-62 after three quarters and reserves



BOSTON: Jerome Robinson #18 of the Golden State Warriors drives to the basket against Xavier Tillman #26 of the Boston Celtics during the second half at TD Garden on March 03, 2024 in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

cruised to the finish as the Celtics improved to 29-3 at home this season. Eastern Conference leader Boston improved the league's best record to 48-12 while Golden State slid to 32-28, ninth in the Western Conference.

"We have a lot of experience. We've grown, we've matured," Brown said. "We're primed and we're ready." "There's a lot of respect for the Golden State Warriors, but we feel like it's our time now." The Minnesota Timberwolves (42-19) fell from the West lead after losing at home 89-88 to the Los Angeles Clippers while Oklahoma City (42-18) secured the top spot by winning at Phoenix 118-110.

Kawhi Leonard's two free throws with 13 seconds remaining gave the Clippers an 89-86 lead. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards drove to the basket for a dunk with three seconds remaining but the T-Wolves never got the ball back. — AFP